Community Participation:

A Self Assessment Toolkit for Partnerships
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Self Assessment Tools for the Start Up Phase

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Community Participation: A Self Assessment Toolkit for Partnerships

Engage East Midlands 2001
Community Participation has been developed as part of Engage East Midlands' programme to enable more effective voluntary and community sector participation in partnerships across the region. It is best used as part of a facilitated process. For further information about Community Participation and facilitated support provided by Engage East Midlands please contact:

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East Midlands Development Agency is highly committed to community participation within partnerships and recognises that achieving genuine inclusion is a long-term and sometimes difficult process. We are delighted to have funded this toolkit, which supports partnerships through a variety of methods to increase the quality and extent of their community participation.

David Wallace

Director of Strategy and Communications

East Midlands Development Agency

2001
Foreword

Engage East Midlands aims to support the voluntary and community sector so that it is able to make best use of its strengths and contribute as an equal partner to the development of the East Midlands.

In 2000 Engage East Midlands was funded by East Midlands Development Agency to develop a self assessment toolkit which could support greater community and voluntary sector participation in regeneration partnerships across the region. We wanted a practical way of demonstrating how communities were included in regeneration and to help communities be included more effectively.

Since our initial idea the list of partnership initiatives has grown further. There are Single Regeneration Budget, New Deal for Communities and Early Years partnerships, Education and Health Action Zones which operate through a partnership structure and this year local strategic partnerships are being set up. In the East Midlands strategic sub regional partnerships have been proposed to develop sub regional economic development strategies.

Government guidance is now clear that these partnerships must be able to demonstrate effective community participation. Our toolkit gives highly practical assistance to support stakeholders in partnerships to self assess current levels of community participation, identify the participation they would like to have and provides a series of practical, relevant exercises to help partnerships get from where they are now to where they want to be.

We’re really excited about the toolkit and what it can achieve and look forward to working with stakeholders within old and new partnerships to achieve more effective participation. Although the toolkit has been produced for the East Midlands, we think it is relevant to all partnerships.

This is the first edition of the toolkit. Although it has been piloted we welcome feedback from those using it, in order to ensure it remains practical and relevant as partnerships evolve.

I’d like to thank all those involved in the development of the toolkit, from initial idea through to piloting and final production. In particular I wish to thank Caroline Clark for writing the toolkit, Nicola Wade for managing the development process and Derby City Partnership’s Normanton Management Group and North Nottinghamshire Youth Disaffection Partnership for piloting the final version.

Kevan Liles

Vice Chair, Engage East Midlands and Chair, Programme Management Board

2001
Introduction

Topics

Community participation in partnership
How to use this self-assessment toolkit
Introduction

Topics

Community participation in partnership
How to use this self assessment toolkit
Community participation in partnership

This self assessment toolkit is being published at a time when community participation in partnership has never been higher up the national agenda.

In particular, the participation of members of the community who are socially excluded is seen as critical to the success of partnership initiatives to improve the quality of life of all parts of the country and all sections of the community.

However, community participation is perhaps the most challenging task for both partnerships and public agencies in all fields. It is always about travelling, and never about arriving: a partnership can never say ‘we have done that, and it worked’.

It is about a style and an approach to working and a set of sophisticated processes which are woven into partnership operations from the first day to the day on which the partnership hands over the baton to its successor agencies. Indeed, partnerships are now asked to build the skills and knowledge of local people for the longer-term benefit of the locality, and not just for their own purposes.

Community participation is not just about welcoming the handful of citizens who present themselves on the doorstep to offer their comments. It is not just about holding periodic open days and issuing leaflets to inform residents about the exciting new developments in their neighbourhood.

The word ‘participation’ implies that local people and groups will be involved in the decision making about priorities and the allocation of funding, in the management of the programmes and services devised for their areas, in the delivery of projects and activities in their communities, and in the design of the structures and processes which enable change to come about.

Traditionally, local people were involved as users and beneficiaries of initiatives devised on their behalf. Enlightened service providers consulted their users on the shape and scope of their services. ‘Participation’ implies that local people and groups will have far more status and influence than this within the system.

The work of the Social Exclusion Unit since 1997 has substantiated the research done in the 1980s and early 1990s showing that for many of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and sections of the community, conditions have hardened rather than improved. Ironically, these groups are the hardest to reach and the least likely to come forward to join the partnership initiatives that could improve their quality of life.

To achieve their objectives, partnerships need to reach out to the people and groups most in need of their assistance. As not all of the people can be involved all of the time, they need to devise representative systems which make the partnership accountable to the wider group of citizens in the locality. This means understanding the composition of the community and ensuring that all sections of it can have an influence on the agenda and play an active and equal role in the work of the partnership.

A wide range of tasks, skills and techniques are employed in achieving this. Profiling or mapping; networking; consulting; shared analysis and understanding; joint planning; capacity and confidence building; skills transfer; democratic decision making and management; and the design of accessible structures and processes. Successful community structures and processes depend on this ‘whole systems’ approach.
How to use this self assessment toolkit

The purpose of this self assessment toolkit

This self-assessment toolkit has been created by Engage East Midlands to give very practical assistance to those who wish to increase the quality and extent of community participation in their partnership.

The intention is that partnerships will arrange facilitated workshops and review days to undertake their chosen exercises. A group selects a number of the exercises contained here, according to the phase of development their partnership is at, and the issues they wish to address. By working through the exercises they have selected, they will be able to design or redesign partnership strategies and methods in such a way that they can encourage and enable higher levels of community participation. Independent facilitation of the exercises will ensure that all stakeholders are able to contribute to the self assessment process.

The next section, ‘Getting Community Participation Right’, gives an introduction to the issues involved and provides a framework of principles for the work that follows, but the toolkit is not intended to be read through at one sitting in an academic kind of way. Nor is it a benchmarking or auditing tool which asks partnership players to tick boxes and score their performance against an external standard. It can be used for private study, but its main purpose is as a tool for group use.

The questions and exercises in this publication have been crafted to help users to clarify what they want to achieve, what current good practice says they ‘ought’ to achieve, and how they can move on from their present situation towards their goals by understanding the size and nature of the gap between the two, and devising their own plans of action to cross that gap.

The intention is that after using this set of self assessment tools, partnerships will know in very practical terms what they could do to increase the quality and effectiveness of their community participation practices.

Some caveats

In very few places will this publication directly tell users ‘what to do’. There is no one recipe for success as every partnership has its own unique circumstances. Neither will it attempt to specify standards as a benchmarking exercise would. The self assessment toolkit calls on users to do some thinking and some work of their own! It is up to the individual partnership to set its own goals and standards and devise its own plan of action. As a result, the publication cannot really be used to undertake a superficial, one-off exercise to head off critics or satisfy monitoring officers that the correct procedures have been followed.

Neither does this publication take the view that community sector = good / public sector = bad or community sector = should be in control / public sector = should be in the back seat. There are all kinds of reasons why people do not get involved in partnerships, and not all of them are to do with the propensity of the public sector to put itself in the driving seat. This self assessment toolkit will call upon community, voluntary and public sectors to think about the practicalities of getting involved with each other as equal and respectful partners.
Orientating yourself around this publication

This self assessment toolkit is set out as follows:

pages 1 - 21  Getting Community Participation Right
An introduction to the subject, a review of what is currently accepted as good practice on community participation, an analysis of what broad terms like ‘community’ and ‘participation’ mean, and a breakdown of the roles and tasks involved in each phase of partnership development, with their implications for the community and voluntary sectors.

page 23  Using the self assessment tools: A flowchart and index
Pull-out flow chart for reference as you work through different sections of the toolkit.

pages 25 - 35  Self Assessment Tools for Everyone
A set of exercises for all users of the toolkit to work through before they select their own mix of exercises from the subsequent sections.

pages 37 - 80  Self Assessment Tools for all phases of partnership development
Five sets of exercises grouped according to the point in the partnership lifecycle when they are most likely to be useful. The organising principle is that particular issues about participation are more relevant than others at specific stages of partnership development, as follows:

pages 37 - 44  Self Assessment Tools for the Start Up Phase
pages 45 - 58  Self Assessment Tools for the Planning Phase
pages 59 - 68  Self Assessment Tools for the Implementation Phase
pages 69 - 74  Self Assessment Tools for the Evaluation Phase
pages 75 - 80  Self Assessment Tools for the Renewal Phase

pages 81 - 82  References and Reading list

How to use the self assessment exercises

We suggest that individual users begin by reading the introductory chapter between pages 1 and 21. This will give a framework for the exercises that come later and explain why the publication has been set out in the way it has. More impatient readers can read ‘The evidence that things might be going wrong’ between pages 16 and 21 which will give pointers about the possible root causes of any problems they have and thus indicate the specific exercises that could be helpful.

When the tool is used in a group setting (a workshop or strategy development session), the facilitator can either ask participants to read pages 1 to 21 in advance of the session, or s/he can incorporate the materials between these pages into his/her introductory sessions.

All users should then complete the exercises between pages 25 and 35 before they proceed any further. These exercises are intended to provide a starting point for any further thinking. They ask users to define their current situation and the goals they would like to achieve. They also ask users to clarify what precisely they mean when they say they would like the ‘community’ to ‘participate’ in the partnership.
How to use the self assessment exercises continued

When the exercises between page 25 and 35 have been completed, the partnership will have some clear indications of the nature of some of the issues they will need to address, and they will also have some clues about which of the exercises in the following sections they might want to undertake.

The next step is to turn to the section of the toolkit which relates to the phase of development of the partnership in question. The subject matter of each exercise is summarised on the contents page. Users can either work through all the exercises in this section or they may wish to select a mix of the exercises shown there which seem to be appropriate to their needs.

At regular intervals ‘cross-references’ are given. These indicate to the user that there are other exercises which may also be relevant to their needs. Again, it is up to the users and their facilitator to select the range of exercises that will help them to move forward. For both individual users and groups, the idea is that tailored development programmes can be created by ‘picking and mixing’ the exercises that appear to be useful. The exercises are rounded up by returning to page 35 to construct an action plan for implementation.

Partnerships in the ‘start up’ and ‘planning’ phases

People using the toolkit in these phases may find that they develop a substantial agenda when they select the exercises which appear relevant to them. However, these partnerships have an enormous advantage over others: getting the main planks of the community participation strategy right at this stage will provide a really strong and stable foundation for future success.

Partnerships at the ‘implementation’ and ‘renewal’ phases

People using the toolkit in these phases will find themselves referring to exercises in earlier sections as many of the issues which manifest themselves at these stages have their roots in their previous phases of development. Partnerships in these phases should look at the contents list for the earlier phases to see if any of the exercises provided there might help them to resolve some of the problems they are facing.

Strategic level partnerships

The self-assessment tools are as relevant for partnerships which work at a strategic level and at citywide, countywide or sub-regional levels as they are for partnerships working at a more local level. Community representation and participation present slightly different challenges for these partnerships, but the needs of partnerships working at these levels have been borne in mind as the assessment tools were prepared and are referred to specifically where appropriate.

Remember to use the contents page and the ‘cross-reference’ boxes in the text to steer yourself to other sections and exercises which could be relevant to your needs.
Getting Community Participation Right

Topics

- The reasons for partnership
- The benefits of community participation
- The barriers to community participation
- The partnership life cycle
- What is community participation
- The evidence that things might be going wrong
Getting Community Participation Right

Topics

The reasons for partnership
The benefits of community participation
The barriers to community participation
The partnership lifecycle
What is community participation
The evidence that things might be going wrong
The reasons for partnership

Partnerships are here to stay for the foreseeable future, and will probably be extended to new areas of public life as the result of recent changes in Government policy. The promotion of ‘Best Value’, the agenda of ‘Modernising Local Government’, the creation of a regional tier of government, the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and in the East Midlands the new strategic sub-regional partnerships are all policy changes which will encourage the formation of new partnerships fulfilling a wider range of objectives. These partnerships will affect more local authority departments than have the regeneration partnerships set up over the last ten years. Other public agencies, such as the police and probation services and health authorities, will also receive stronger encouragement to form partnerships with others in order to deliver their services in a different way.

There will be one common denominator in all these partnerships, however: the community. For a number of reasons, community involvement is now seen as essential, and this is a policy requirement which is unlikely to change in the next few years.

The challenges of partnership working

Partnerships make public life far more complicated. The Audit Commission has commented that ‘making partnerships work effectively is one of the toughest challenges facing public sector managers’.¹ Because they are set up for a wide variety of purposes, with different time-scales and different structures, there can be no one ‘recipe for success’: each partnership has to create its own agenda, design its own programmes and make its own decisions about how it will deliver its chosen outcomes.

It also has to decide who needs to be involved in order to make the partnership a success. Who are the ‘stakeholders’; in other words, who are the individuals and organisations that have a ‘stake’ of some kind in the work of the partnership. Participating within strategic partnerships in particular is a challenge for communities, and again there is no single recipe for success.

However, one useful starting point can be to consider the purposes for which the partnership has been set up.

The five purposes of partnership

Partnerships can operate on a geographic basis or they can focus on particular themes without having a specific geographical basis. They can be very formal or very loose. They can have a specific timespan and budget, or be very open-ended. These variations often depend on the purposes for which they are set up.

The neighbourhood regeneration partnership

These are generally started by local authorities and form the majority of publicly-funded partnerships. They tackle a range of problems in well-defined geographical areas which almost always have a large residential population. Their funding ties them into formal timetables and outputs.

The neighbourhood trust

An increasingly popular trend is to establish longer-term trusts, often with services or assets which generate income streams that enable them to carry on delivering community benefits. They are often set up to succeed and carry on the work of ‘time-limited’ partnerships in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The themed partnership

Ages with common aims often come together to bid for funds that enable them to work together to deliver integrated programmes on particular themes, such as crime prevention, youth provision or training, educational provision or health. The general expectation is that if the innovations made are successful, then any short-term special funding will be replaced in time by mainstream funds from the agencies involved.
The service providers network
Sometimes service providers work together in a partnership spirit over time without setting up formal mechanisms to do so or recruiting new staff. The agencies involved collaborate informally and seek to co-ordinate their efforts, where possible, to achieve greater efficiency and impact. This can either be in a specific geographical area or on a particular range of services.

The strategic partnership
City-wide partnerships set up to improve the fortunes or image of a place have proved how successful they can be over the last twenty years. New layers of strategic partnerships are now being created at regional, sub-regional and county levels, bringing together the key players to address current issues and to plan ahead for the new challenges for the area.

It is now expected that the community will be involved in all these types of partnerships, along with the other relevant stakeholders, but as should be clear by now, the purposes of the partnerships and the ‘level’ at which they operate will profoundly affect who will (and can) be involved, and how they can participate. This is one of the conundrums that partnerships need to unravel in order to ensure they get community participation ‘right’. The general public is now far more likely to ask questions about who makes decisions and on what basis they do so, and therefore uncritical choices about partners are increasingly likely to be challenged.

Partnerships are for the public benefit
Partnerships which involve public agencies (like local authorities) are generally set up because neither mainstream services nor market forces have been able to deliver a satisfactory quality of life for everyone in the area - whether this is a neighbourhood or a wider geographical area, like a city or county.

There are geographical areas where there is stagnation or a downward spiral of decline, in terms of jobs, housing, crime or attractiveness as a place to live. There are also groups of people within communities who are disproportionately affected by adverse social, economic, environmental or cultural factors: people who have been unemployed for some time or who cannot get onto the job ladder; who have low or unreliable incomes; who don’t have the formal qualifications they need to get a job; who have sole responsibility for childcare; who are elderly, ill or have disabilities of some kind; or are discriminated against because of prejudices about their colour, race or culture.

Essentially, partnerships are formed to address these issues and focus attention on the needs of these areas and sections of the community. They are created to make a special effort to put things right in circumstances where public services haven’t been able to deliver a good quality of life for everyone and the local economy hasn’t provided a good standard of living in terms of jobs and amenities.

Where they can, partnerships work to eradicate the root causes of these problems; they also try to soften the impact of the problems for the communities concerned, and to stop people falling through ‘the gaps’. Ultimately, the reason for partnership is to benefit the community.
The benefits of community participation

The benefits of involving the community in partnership have been well-rehearsed in many sets of guidelines over the last ten years, and are now generally accepted. They are usually said to be:

*Better decision-making*

By consulting the community and deepening their understanding of the issues, partnerships are more likely to select the right kinds of programmes of activity, delivered in the right kind of way, and thus achieve better results.

*More effective service delivery*

By involving the beneficiaries in the design - and possibly also in the delivery of services - programmes of activity are more likely to be successful in terms of their relevance, usage levels, their outputs and hence their impact.

*Greater community support*

By obtaining the co-operation and active support of the community, programmes and projects will get wider endorsement, again increasing their chances of success. In turn, this will increase the lifespan of the activities (their sustainability) as the community steps in to run the activities in the longer term.

*Community development*

Partnership activities can be the spur to more community involvement in neighbourhood affairs, and can give local residents the chance to gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to play a more active role in their communities in the future.

*Renewal of local democracy*

Particularly in areas where people have lost faith in the political process and the ability of services to meet their needs, partnerships can demonstrate to local communities that it is worthwhile to engage with public agencies because they can influence the outcomes. This can lead to communities which were previously labelled as ‘disaffected’ becoming far more likely to participate in self-help programmes and activities.

*Increased resources*

By involving the community, partnerships can attract more resources in a number of ways. Firstly, communities donate a great deal of volunteer labour. Voluntary and community groups can lever in funds which are not available to public agencies. And by getting involved, communities can enable partnerships to access funds which are dependent on their involvement.

All of these are benefits which have been observed in successful partnerships, and as importantly, they are benefits which are welcomed by communities themselves. In areas where mutual trust and respect have been built between partners, and where the process of working together in partnership has been seen as important, the higher levels of community participation have brought an ‘added value’ to the results achieved.

The benefits go both ways. It grieves public agencies when standards of housing, health, crime, education, employment and quality of life remain low, despite the spending and staff hours which have gone into local services, because of the intractability of the problems in some areas. When relationships between officers and the community are strained, positive change is difficult to bring about. Partnerships are not a miracle cure for these situations, but because they offer the chance for innovation, for linkage between services, for swifter action and for learning, and because they often prompt a more sustained and purposeful dialogue with local people, they can be a real turning point.
The barriers to community participation

As The Audit Commission comments in its Management Paper, ‘A Fruitful Partnership’ 3, ‘there is no blueprint’ for deciding who should be involved in a partnership.

‘Partnerships that are trying to take a strategic approach to a complex problem may need a large number of members in order to encompass all the key players in a sizeable geographic area. Similarly, partnerships that aim to generate a wide-ranging vision for the future of an area will need to involve large numbers of organisations if community interests are to be fully represented’.

Involving the community is possibly the most complex and labour-intensive responsibility that partnerships take on. This is partly because community participation is not a one-off, time-limited task, but an on-going commitment. It is partly because ‘consultation’ is no longer sufficient on its own: to achieve real participation, the community needs to be involved in all aspects and at all levels of the partnership’s work. It is also because there is no such thing as ‘the community’: the population is made up of individuals and groups and hosts of different ‘communities’ with different circumstances and needs, and different aspirations. And the factor which makes it most complex is that it is precisely those groups the partnership is setting out to benefit the most which are the least likely to volunteer to be involved.

Danny Burns and Marilyn Taylor in their recent Joseph Rowntree publication, ‘Auditing Community Participation’ 4, comment that communities often feel marginalised because the ‘rules of the game’, the culture and methods of working of public sector partners, and the lack of resources and organisational capacity in the community sector can be forbidding and counter-productive and thus can undermine their full involvement.

As will be seen in the next section, the time, energy and imagination which go into the very early stages of partnership development are critical. This is the stage when the most goodwill (or badwill) can be generated, and the point at which the community can fundamentally affect the partnership agenda.

Time, energy and imagination are crucial at this stage, and throughout the life of the partnership because the communities and individuals who are most disadvantaged and excluded particularly need to be brought on board and have their needs and priorities understood, but they are also the communities who find it hardest to become involved.

The Office for Public Management 5 suggests that people can be excluded for four major kinds of reasons:

- they can be ‘economically excluded’, not able to afford a decent standard of living (housing, heating, food, clothes and so on) because of low incomes from employment, benefits or pensions, or unreliable levels of earnings coming into the household;
- they can be ‘socially excluded’ because of harassment, crime, domestic abuse, fear for their children, or because they cannot call on family and friends for support;
- they can be ‘culturally excluded’ by reason of prejudice against their racial origin, colour, religious beliefs, disability or sexuality, or because of their language and cultural beliefs;
- they can be ‘politically excluded’ by not getting any support from ‘the system’, either politicians or pressure groups, and by not knowing how to exercise their rights and how to find assistance.
The partnership lifecycle

The reason for considering the partnership ‘lifecycle’ is because it is so fundamentally important to the subject of community participation. There are distinct phases in the development of partnerships - from the point at which they are conceived to the point at which they wind up. It is true that many of the principles of good practice are common to all the phases, but there are also particular thought processes and tasks which need to be undertaken at particular points in the cycle and that deeply affect the success of both that phase and the phases which happen later on in the partnership’s lifecycle.

Community participation is not a bolt-on extra which happens - or fails to happen - alongside the partnership development process. To be successful, it needs to be an intrinsic part of the development process.

However, if it becomes apparent over time that the level and quality of participation by the community is unsatisfactory, then a partnership can begin to understand the root causes for the problems by reviewing what happened in the earlier phases of its growth. By deducing what has gone wrong, it can often backtrack and try to put them right.

The five phases in the partnership lifecycle

There could be said to be five phases in the partnership lifecycle. These are illustrated in the diagram below, and the thought-processes and tasks associated with each one are expanded upon in the next few pages.

In the start-up phase, the reasons for starting a partnership are thought through: what needs will it meet, what will its ‘mission’ be.

In the planning phase, decisions about how the partnership will deliver its aims are made.

In the implementation phase, the partnership is delivering its activities, focusing on what will be done, when and by whom.

The evaluation phase is concerned with reviewing the evidence to see how well the partnership has performed.

In the renewal phase, decisions are made about what will happen next. Pilot schemes usually end at this point, but partnerships which carry on for several years will start the cycle again at the ‘planning phase’ in each year of their lives.
Phase one - The start-up phase

The start-up phase happens before the partnership is pulled together, and at this point, fundamental decisions are made that profoundly influence the whole future of the partnership. Once the ‘mission’ (the essential purpose) of the partnership is decided, the ‘strategic objectives’ (the main aims) are crafted and negotiations are underway with the main potential funders, the course the partnership will take for the rest of its lifetime is largely set.

Full involvement by the community in the very earliest stages (the initial research and the identification of needs and priorities) and in the decisions which follow provide strong foundations for subsequent community participation.

What can go wrong at this stage

• The initial research takes in official statistics and the views of public agencies and private sector partners, but either fails to include consultation with the community, or curtails it on the grounds that it is too time-consuming and costly;

• The language used (jargon and official terminology) and the usual working methods of the officers who are organising the start-up phase are impenetrable for the community;

• Consultations do not attract inputs from key sections of the community: either it is ‘too late’ to remedy the situation, or it is not noticed until much later in the process;

• The terms and conditions set by potential funders are not explained and as a result, the decisions made appear to be perverse;

• Community concerns are outweighed by the priorities and preferences of the major organisations involved, or the conditions attached to the most likely sources of funding;

• The mission statement, strategic objectives and funding bids are worked up to tight time-scales and submitted by officers of one or more of the agencies involved before those involved in consultations can satisfy themselves that their needs, concerns and priorities are reflected in the documents;

• Consultations are followed by long periods of silence from the organisers;

• Unsuccessful bids - or unsuccessful portions of bids - lead to major agencies diverting their attention to new areas or priorities without explanation.

Such factors can be the root causes of low levels of community endorsement and participation.
Phase two - The planning phase

When a partnership is first set up, there is a period of planning, generally lasting a few months, during which the framework for the partnership’s operations is designed. This is an important period for community participation because the partnership can build community consultation and representation into all the detailed planning activities and then into all the structures, processes and procedures through which it will do its work.

At this stage, the partnership can ensure that the community is involved in all the roles that need to be played: decision-making, management, delivery and monitoring and evaluation, as well as being beneficiaries.

What can go wrong at this stage

- For a partnership that is bidding for external funds, the length of the planning period is decided by the funders who will also tend to make funding dependent on whether the plans meet their criteria. The timescales and availability of funding can militate against both the joint planning process and the development of these multiple roles;

- In some areas, key partnership players like councillors and senior officers can have hierarchical attitudes about how decisions are made and who is allowed to make them;

- The officers organising the planning process can make assumptions about what roles the community is capable of or wants to play, and do not envisage that there might be change in the future;

- Resourcing for consultation, involvement in management, capacity building and ample communication are not built into the budgets; time for these activities is not built into the work programme; and outputs relating to them are not included in the delivery plan;

- In neighbourhoods where relations between the local authority and the community have been strained, hostile or apathetic, the officers organising the planning process avoid the known critics or tend to work only with few voluntary or community sector representatives who are known to be supportive;

- Organisational structures are designed by local authority or private sector lawyers and reflect their protective stance towards their employers’ legal liabilities, whereas the parts of the structure that relate to consultation, participation and communication are under developed in comparison.
Phase three - The implementation phase

As soon as the partnership’s work schedule is underway, the staff team is focusing most of its time and attention ensuring that projects are delivering their agreed outputs to time and to budget, and the board is overseeing performance. At this stage, how things are done is as important as what is done: are all the programmes and projects run in a participative way by the deliverers?

It is essential for partnerships to ensure that the community members on the board, on working groups and in consultative forums can participate fully in management and supervision and that the wider community is enabled to comment. If voluntary and community groups are not involved as delivery agents, the partnership can assist them through the selection process.

What can go wrong at this stage?

- The participative culture of the partnership does not apply to delivery agents whose methods lead to the exclusion of the community from the process on the ground;

- Boards, working groups and forums do not encourage discussion, fully-informed decision making and learning, and disagreements and dissent are headed-off rather than faced;

- People feel they cannot challenge ‘the experts’, and cannot gain enough expertise to be sure of their ground when asking questions or suggesting alternatives;

- Communication and information-giving activities are under-resourced;

- Repeated queries and criticisms cannot be answered because they relate to the decisions that were made in the start-up phase and it is too late to change them;

- Community and voluntary groups keep on failing in their bids for funds and contracts.
Phase Four - The evaluation phase

At least once a year, partnerships set out to evaluate their performance, and for those with external funding, this is often wholly a process of satisfying the funders’ expectations - in other words, tallying up the outputs. The evaluation process is an opportunity to go a lot further and test just how effective the work of the partnership has been, particularly for the community for whose benefit the activities have been carried out.

Outputs are just the tip of the iceberg: the real test of a partnership is whether there are qualitative changes in the area, and whether there is evidence that the positive developments could be sustained over time.

What can go wrong at this stage

- Information is collected only about funders’ expected outputs and not about broader measures of success for the area;
- The community is not asked to participate in the evaluation process, and if their views emerge, there is evidently a large mismatch between their assessment of success and the official figures;
- The findings of external evaluators are not published if they question the preferred verdict on the partnership’s work;
- People assess the achievements of the partnership as if its budget was as high as the local authority’s mainstream budgets for the neighbourhood: it becomes clear that people expected the partnership to remedy all the problems experienced in the area;
- The facts and perceptions gathered are not used to inform future plans for the area;
- Partners feel unable to share the credit for success with each other;
- The results of the evaluation are not used as the basis for learning about what works and what doesn’t;
- The major agencies are unwilling to let the results influence their usual working methods, and opportunities to be more responsive to community views are passed up.
Phase five - The renewal phase

Partnerships prepare plans for the future at the end of each year of work. If the partnership has further year(s) of funding, it prepares its new 12 month work programme and delivery plan. This is an opportunity to widen the process of consultation and participation and be more responsive to community views in the coming year.

At the end of its lifetime, the partnership also needs to consider what will come next. The regeneration process is rarely complete by the time the partnership is wound-up, so it needs to plan well in advance whether and how its work should be continued. This affords the opportunity to hand on at least some responsibility to the community.

What can go wrong at this stage

- The effectiveness of the previous strategy is not reviewed and the partnership compounds the problems of the past by rolling forward programmes which needed to change;

- Partners and stakeholders are not informed or consulted about ideas for the future in time for them to influence the agenda;

- The results of the evaluation do not guide information, communication, capacity-building and involvement programmes and budgets for the future;

- Roles are not reviewed, and in particular, no plans are made to develop individuals’ and organisations’ capacities to play expanded roles in the future;

- Major agencies propose to return to their original ways of doing things, with relief that the extra commitment required by the partnership is over;

- Plans are made to hand over partnership responsibilities to other agencies, but they are not put in hand soon enough to prepare these other agencies to take on the envisaged roles;

- Ideas for fundraising are not pursued sufficiently in advance to enable programmes and activities to carry on seamlessly;

- The partnership lets essential personnel, knowledge and expertise leach away before the initiative is formally wound up, so that successor bodies cannot pick up where the partnership left off.
What is community participation?

The term ‘community participation’ is taking over from the phrase ‘community involvement’ which was common currency in the 1990s, largely it seems, because the latter was somewhat devalued by the huge variations in practice around the country during that decade. The word ‘participation’ suggests more active and committed levels of engagement than were achieved by many partnerships that said they were ‘involving’ the community.

Achieving high levels of community participation and positive endorsement from local people is the most complex task partnerships undertake. Variations are often largely based on local history. Different local authority cultures and political styles can affect local propensity to get involved. In many severely disadvantaged neighbourhoods, people do not willingly engage with the public agencies. In some areas, very little community development has taken place since the 1980s.

The different starting points for every partnership make absolute standards and benchmarks and concrete recommendations very difficult to apply. Each partnership must set out to know and understand ‘its community’, to establish its baseline - or starting point - and to set firm principles and goals for its community participation programmes. Some of the research and analysis done on the factors which influence patterns of participation gives a useful starting point.

Defining ‘participation’

Attitudes and approaches to the delivery of public services are as subject to trends as anything else, and the involvement of the community was accepted practice at times before the 1990s. In fact, much of the theory about community participation current today is based on American research from the 1960s when a US government adviser called Sherry Arnstein devised a ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’ based on her observations of a US inner cities programme 6.

Arnstein’s ladder had eight rungs which represented the different levels of power and influence accorded to local communities by public agencies.

At the top of the ladder, government could cede control of the initiative to the community and one rung below this, they could delegate resources and responsibility to the community on the basis of an agreed contract. The third rung down was partnership between the community and the public sector. For Sherry Arnstein, only these top three rungs of her ladder represented any degree of power and influence for the community.

Figure six: Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation

Below this level, Arnstein observed tokenism towards the community (‘placation’); a one-sided relationship she called ‘consultation’; and a rung she called ‘therapy’, which she summed up as attempts by public agencies to correct what they saw as the unhealthy attitudes and habits of the poor. At the bottom rungs, no power or influence was shared.
Arnstein defined partnership as a sharing of planning and decision-making powers with the community, with genuine negotiation and bargaining taking place. To engage at this level, the community needed to be well organised and resourced and have accountable representatives who could influence the other partners’ agenda.

The key issue for Arnstein was whether local people had ‘the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process’. Giving information to the community, consulting them and delivering schemes to improve their lot in life does not redistribute power and influence between public agencies and local people. Where the community is ‘placated’ by being given a minor degree of influence over some of the less important decisions, they can still be outvoted by other partners. As a result, said Arnstein, the status quo gets preserved.

The ladder demonstrates that although good communication and consultation are vital activities for getting people involved, and although responsiveness to local problems and needs is critical, this does not give a balance of power to the community.

In many areas of this country in the 1990s, local people were involved in partnerships only as users, beneficiaries and ‘consultees’. These partnerships brought resources into neighbourhoods, but they did not encourage community participation in the more influential roles within the partnership: decision-making, management and delivery. The expectation now is that local people will have a real influence over the agenda of the partnership and the allocation of its resources.

When the community is fully participating in the partnership, they will be involved in five separate roles.

### Five roles for the community

#### Users and beneficiaries
of the activities and funds of the partnership. This is the most basic level of engagement.

#### Advisers
to the partnership through their involvement in consultations, working parties and evaluations which seek their guidance and feedback.

#### Contributors to management
through membership of forums and steering groups that work alongside partnership staff supervising progress on partnership activities.

#### Decision makers
primarily through their membership of the partnership board, but also when periodic consultations are taking place about strategic choices and other major decisions.

#### Deliverers
of projects and programmes on behalf of the partnership and as local successor bodies that are being developed to take over projects and programmes from the partnership.

In ‘Active Partners: Benchmarking Community Participation in Regeneration’ 7, published by Yorkshire Forward, authors Wilde and Wilson say that there are four key requirements from partnerships if full community participation is to be developed. Partnerships have to think about how they encourage and set standards for:

- Inclusiveness
- Communication
- Influence
- Capacity development

Only by focusing on these dimensions can partnerships encourage more participation.
Understanding the community

One of the factors which makes community participation so complex is that there is no such thing as ‘the community’. The word is used to describe the thousands if not millions of individuals who live in a given area and might also work there to help local people.

As well as researching the officially published statistics and gathering data from local agencies, partnerships also need to understand in more detail the circumstances of the individuals who live and work in their areas.

In order to start unravelling the complexities involved, it is worth unpacking the term ‘the community’ to be more precise about exactly who might be included in the definition. ‘The community’ might be said to be made up of a number of different groupings.

Local residents
are the individuals and families who live in the area under consideration - what might be called ‘communities of place’ or ‘geographical communities’

Grassroots community groups
are local bands of volunteers who have got together to take action on a common cause. They tend not to have formal organisational structures, as they do not have funds and paid staff: they are fluid groupings of activists with perhaps a single issue on which they are campaigning or protesting

Communities of interest
are sections of the community who have common life factors which mean they can be seen as a group within society. Teenagers, people over the age of 60 and individual minority ethnic groups are some examples of communities of interest

Locally-run voluntary groups
range from tenants’ associations to local trusts but all have in common that they are managed by local people. They can range from small self-help groups run entirely by volunteers to well-funded community centres with paid staff and grant-funded programmes, but their management committees have local people in the majority.

Other voluntary groups
may also have a considerable presence in the local community but they are not generally seen as part of the community because they are not run by local people. However, they can and do have an important role both in the community and in partnership working, either because of their skills, their contacts, their client groups or the resources they can bring into the locality. This part of the voluntary sector includes local or regional branches of national charities, councils for voluntary service, rural community councils and a wide range of agencies with specialist services.
Understanding the differences

These differentiations matter because they matter to local people. Residents can feel excluded if statutory organisations assume that the director of a voluntary agency can speak on their behalf. The majority of voluntary agencies, even well-established locally-run groups, will feel very uncomfortable if they are asked to ‘represent’ the broad spectrum of local views, although they will feel more assured when asked to act as go-betweens to their own client groups.

As a result, partnerships need to develop a sophisticated understanding of the make-up of the community in their area and to create a range of mechanisms to reach out to the relevant groupings within it.

Securing participation from all sections of the community will depend on whether the partnership understands the broad range of perceptions, needs, aspirations and priorities which exist among local people and groups.

In particular, certain communities of interest are less likely to become involved unless they are specifically targeted. These include black and minority ethnic groups, young people, and those who are socially excluded for economic, social, cultural or political reasons - precisely the groups which most need partnership intervention. The barriers to their inclusion are higher than those for other groups, and they are harder to reach.

By being aware of their circumstances, partnerships can tailor their communications and their programmes, undertake outreach work, provide extra resources and offer outcomes which meet their particular needs.

The potential roles for groups

It is up to each partnership to determine whether it is more appropriate to work directly with residents, or to work with intermediary groups, or to do both.

The type or purpose of the partnership will be a major determinant of this. City-wide or strategic partnerships and many service providers networks will for practical reasons need to work on the whole with a range of broadly representative groups because of the sheer numbers of residents or clients covered by their geographical area. Neighbourhood based partnerships and themed partnerships will want to work with individuals, but can also benefit from working with a range of groups.

The potential advantages of involving groups in partnership activities can include:

- Tapping into funds of local knowledge about the area, particular client groups, local networks or specialist subjects;
- Gaining access to communities of interest who can be hard-to-reach through other means;
- Meeting partnership objectives through supporting existing community-based initiatives rather than duplicating them;
- Accessing outreach or capacity building services which already have a good track record with local people or smaller groups;
- Building up skills and experience within agencies that can add value to partnership activities now and after the partnership’s funding expires.
The evidence that things might be going wrong

As was suggested earlier, all partnerships have different starting points, and in some areas or with some subjects (for example, economic development), it may prove more difficult to engage the community. Mistrust, a history of tense relationships or an unwillingness to engage with officialdom may make the initial stages of establishing a partnership a long and complex process involving much patience and persistence.

Disagreements or debates are not, however, a sign of an ‘unhealthy’ partnership: they may be the reflection of a healthy dialogue.

Securing healthy community participation is not a ‘once and for all’ stage of partnership development: it is a lifelong process which needs to be at the core of partnership activity.

There may be signs and signals that the community, or sections of it, are unhappy with progress. Sometimes these signs can be difficult to interpret, or their root causes may lie in an earlier phase of the partnership’s development. The tables below and on the next pages give some suggestions on the possible origins of community dissatisfaction to help with the process of diagnosis.

Diagnosis chart - symptoms, possible root causes and suggestions

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<tr>
<th>List of symptoms</th>
<th>Possible root causes</th>
<th>Exercises to use</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start-up phase</td>
<td>Start-up phase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at public meetings is low</td>
<td>Publicity not appropriate because of language or timing or distribution. Meetings held at inconvenient times or inappropriate venues.</td>
<td>p 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requests for responses (for example, via questionnaires) yield low returns</td>
<td>‘Cold call’ methods do have low returns, so need to reinforced with other methods (door-to-door work, publicity, intervention by trusted intermediaries, back-up from local groups)</td>
<td>p 38, p 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial public meetings are stormy and disjointed: the agenda is badly disrupted</td>
<td>Meetings may provide opportunity for people to vent their general dissatisfaction with local services. Sections of the community may be expressing their mistrust about what they have heard so far about the partnership. The format and chairing of the meeting could be arousing frustration among participants.</td>
<td>p 41, p 42, p 60, p 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants from the community are an homogenous group, for example of one colour, from one age group or gender</td>
<td>If the participants do not reflect the make-up of the local community, the subject matter, language, targeting of the publicity, timing or venue choice could have inhibited some groups from attending. The identity of the hosts could deter some participants.</td>
<td>p 28, p 41, p 61, p 66</td>
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## Diagnosis chart continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>List of symptoms</th>
<th>Possible root causes</th>
<th>Exercises to use</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community responses have the underlying message that ‘we don’t believe you’</td>
<td>Attitudes could be based on past history or could be because an inconsistent message or a ‘top-down’ tone has been detected</td>
<td>p 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organised lobbying and protest seem to be taking place in the locality</td>
<td>An interested section of the community feels excluded or over-ruled and is using visible methods to get their message across. On occasion, there can be a party political slant involved, but this should not be assumed</td>
<td>p 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary sector and community representatives refuse to sign funding bids or contact funders directly about the bid</td>
<td>At least some sections of the community feel the bid does not reflect local concerns and priorities and want to see objectives or funding plans altered: they have concluded the partnership will not listen to their views</td>
<td>p 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning phase</td>
<td><em>The planning phase</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments from community stakeholders are requested but not received, or are concerned with unlikely aspects of the paperwork</td>
<td>Unexplained technical language and jargon could be the reason for lack of engagement, as could timescales that are too short</td>
<td>p 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groups and individuals complain to senior officers or to councillors about the process or the contents of the paperwork received</td>
<td>The complex paperwork, language, outputs and budget calculations can make people feel excluded, if they are not explained in plain language and circulated in good time</td>
<td>p 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the community continue to give negative responses or begin to be negative having been supportive in the past</td>
<td>The process of preparing the plans - and the timescales and negotiations involved - can easily exclude people. A desire to spare people the technicalities can be seen as an attempt to prevent them being involved in the important decisions. Paperwork is often prepared by a small group working privately and under pressure, and this can generate high levels of mistrust in others</td>
<td>p 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are allegations that the community are being ‘railroaded’ or ‘sidelined’</td>
<td>If work on partnership development is started only in response to funders’ bidding timetables, the planning process is often too short to allow people what they consider to be a reasonable time to respond</td>
<td>p 50</td>
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</table>
### Diagnosis chart continued

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<th>List of symptoms</th>
<th>Possible root causes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The implementation phase</strong></td>
<td>Partnership structures designed at the planning stage can prove to be unworkable or ineffective in practice, but rather than adapt them, partnerships can continue to soldier on with unhelpful arrangements</td>
<td>p 46-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community forums and working parties that involve voluntary and community representatives are not effective: a sense of progress is rare</td>
<td>Meetings can be dull, boring and repetitive. Alternatively, people can feel there is 'no point' in attending because their inputs do not appear to have any visible results</td>
<td>p 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings have low attendance figures, or attendance is conspicuously falling away</td>
<td>‘Ordinary people’ have less of an appetite for sitting in meetings than do people whose work involves regular meetings attendance. Alternatively, meetings are held at times of day and in venues which are accessible only to the minority of interested parties</td>
<td>p 62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The same small group come to all the meetings</td>
<td>Partnership meetings are uninspiring and dull</td>
<td>p 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are a variety of possible causes, including agenda which discourage participation, an authoritarian chairing style, inaccessible and forbidding piles of paperwork, or quite simply, no real occasion for debate or decision-making and no encouragement to engage</td>
<td>Arguments and open conflicts are regular features of board and other meetings</td>
<td>p 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are allegations that partnership officers are ‘avoiding’ talking to the community</td>
<td>The roots of the conflict can lie in the start up and planning phases which set parameters which are not accepted by people who were included only after the key decisions were made. Alternatively, the style and chairing of meetings can generate conflict, as can attempts to ‘engineer’ particular outcomes and decisions. Hostility can also be the end result of people feeling persistently sidelined</td>
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**Exercises** to use:
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- p 61
- p 62
- p 64
- p 52
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<th>List of symptoms</th>
<th>Possible root causes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Community forum meetings are vociferous and critical on a regular basis</td>
<td>There are one or more sources of conflict which are not being addressed. These may be due to the decisions made at the start up or planning phase, the way in which the forum is being organised now, or dissatisfaction with the degree to which the forum is able to influence partnership affairs. Disagreement within the forum may be a healthy sign; it could also be inevitable because of differences of opinions, values or priorities within the community.</td>
<td>p 46-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The partnership is told that the community representatives appointed at various levels are not representative of the community</td>
<td>Representatives can never be 100% representative of ‘the community’ because the community is made up of a very wide range of individuals. However, these charges could be because: the representatives concerned were appointed rather than elected; there are gaps in representation leaving some interest groups without a voice; the representatives are not receiving the practical assistance they need fully to perform their roles; the structures and processes of the partnership do not support them in their work; or for one or more reasons, they are not seen as ‘one of us’. Community representatives can also ‘burn out’ through continuous over-work</td>
<td>p 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some interest groups and sections of the community are conspicuous by their absence</td>
<td>The partnership may not be offering these groups any reason to become involved, or may have set up its processes and structures in such a way that they feel excluded. Some groups need outreach work and approaches tailored specifically for them to get involved. Language and culture may also be barriers</td>
<td>p 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some targets (particularly for minority ethnic groups, young people or socially excluded groups) are consistently or significantly missed</td>
<td>Project deliverers may not have the right experience, contacts or methods to attract these groups, or the projects themselves may be unattractive to users from these groups. Tailored schemes designed to meet their particular needs may not be on offer</td>
<td>p 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of symptoms | Possible root causes | Exercises to use
--- | --- | ---
There is a stream of complaints from the voluntary and community sectors about the contracting, appraisal, financial and project management procedures and timescales | The partnership has not taken the time to explain procedures and funding rules in plain accessible language and may be seen as putting up barriers to community involvement in decisions about the allocation of funding | p 50
There are regular complaints about the percentage of funding which goes to the local voluntary and community sectors | Funding for small, community-based projects may not be on offer from the partnership. Alternatively, the partnership has not taken into account local groups’ ability to get through formal bidding processes in order to access funds, and may not be tailoring its procedures to fit the size and complexity of the contracts on offer. An onus on bidders to bring in matching funds may also block bids from the community and voluntary sectors | p 43
There are critical comments about external consultants taking money out of the partnership | This is often a sign that members of the community believe the wrong contractors are winning funds to focus on the wrong priorities | p 54
Reports on progress are met with cynicism | This may also be a symptom of the problems outlined above | p 55
Overall levels of participation remain low despite efforts to raise them, and there is a lack of engagement with the partnership | Lack of engagement at all levels can be caused by a number of factors, including lack of communication, inappropriate publicity and inaccessible information, lack of investment in community-based activity or in capacity-building, lack of outreach and a perceived lack of encouragement to get involved | p 57

The evaluation phase

When asked, residents tell the partnership and others that there has been little or no progress and that key local issues have not been addressed | Some or all sections of the community were not ‘signed up’ to the decisions made during the start up and planning phases. Residents do not agree with the funding priorities that were made: key concerns were not met | p 58
Residents highlight the disruption caused by the partnership’s work | Project planning and consultation processes did not secure or maintain the full consent of residents or respond to their concerns | p 60

Exercises to use

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key funders ask the partnership to undertake further research and evaluation before plans are made for the following year</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction from certain quarters has reached the ears of funders and has alerted them to the possibility that there is a lack of unity within the partnership which needs to be addressed</td>
<td>p 46-49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The renewal phase</strong></td>
<td><strong>The renewal phase</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts and disagreements occur</td>
<td>Groups who believe their views have been sidelined in the past see this as an opportunity to change the partnership’s agenda</td>
<td>p 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lack of community involvement in the renewal plans</td>
<td>Insufficient communication or consultation has taken place, or insufficient resources have been dedicated to consultation. Alternatively, the community has suffered a loss of confidence in the partnership’s ability to bring about change</td>
<td>p 28-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too few volunteers come forward to join forums, working parties, or the board and there are no new applicants to become community representatives</td>
<td>Community members have become dissaffected by the partnership’s working methods, or alternatively, the partnership has not dedicated enough resources to building the knowledge, skills and confidence of the wider group of participants</td>
<td>p 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elections for community representative posts are hotly contested</td>
<td>Existing community representatives may have weakened their community ties because of the time commitments involved in partnership work and the lack of support to help them fulfill their role to the satisfaction of local people</td>
<td>p 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local groups do not apply to become successor bodies for projects that need to be sustained over the longer term</td>
<td>The partnership has not begun soon enough to build levels of capacity and confidence among local groups to take on projects, and has not helped to secure forward funding to enable a handover to take place</td>
<td>p 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key staff leave before the end of their contracts</td>
<td>This could be due to a lack of belief that the work of the partnership will be sustained beyond the end of the formal funding period</td>
<td>p 76-79</td>
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SELF ASSESSMENT TOOLS: FOR EVERYONE

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: A SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Using the self assessment tools
A flowchart and index

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Please also refer to the 'cross-reference' boxes
Self Assessment
Tools for Everyone

Topics

Where are we now
Identifying the community stakeholders
Understanding current patterns of participation
Working together as partners
Where do we want to be
Self Assessment Tools for Everyone

Topics

Where are we now
Identifying the community stakeholders
Understanding current patterns of participation
Working together as partners
Where do we want to be
Where are we now?

**When to use this process**
- Use this exercise in conjunction with the exercise on page 34 as the starting point for all of the self-assessment processes outlined in this tool, whatever the partnership’s stage of development.

**Suggested preparation**
- Bring together a mixed group if possible, including voluntary sector and community representatives, a range of local public agencies and any other partners and organisations which know the area.

The aim of this exercise is to help you to establish a ‘baseline’ for your development activities, or in other words, to try to reach a common understanding among the partnership stakeholders of the starting point for your work. If you can bring together a mixed group to go through this process, you will gain a broader range of perspectives on the issues involved.

Seeking input from past or current critics may help to resolve some of the underlying differences. It may also be useful to bring in some ‘outsiders’ who know the area or the subject but who haven’t been closely associated with you in the past and might thereby be able to offer some objective insights into the issues. Be sure to use a neutral facilitator if mediation or reconciliation might be needed.

The objective of the exercise is to gain as clear a picture as possible of the current situation, so it is important to undertake this process in a spirit of honesty and critical self-awareness.

**Suggested process**

**Step One**
Issue each participant with a small stack of post-it notes and ask them to work on their own to generate a list of words or short phrases which sum up for them the ‘state of the current relationship’ between local public agencies, local people, voluntary groups and the other partner organisations. Stress that they should record each point on a separate post-it note. If it is necessary, suggest some issues on which they might like to comment.

**Step Two**
Gather in all the post-it notes and sort them out into groups or families of issues preferably on a wall, or perhaps on a table-top. The group can participate in the sorting process. Get the group to spend a few minutes looking at the display. As this is a way of encouraging participants freely to give their views, request that people do not comment on or rebut the statements with which they disagree at this stage.

**Step Three**
The group as a whole can now evaluate the spread of opinions that have been expressed. Questions to pose are:
- Is there a consensus, or are there conflicting perceptions and attitudes within the group?
- Where are the key differences and similarities between the opinions expressed?
- Are these factors consistent or have things been getting better or worse lately?
- Have specific incidents or events contributed to the situation? Can the root causes be pinpointed?

If there are more than 8-10 participants, it will be preferable to discuss these questions in small groups first. Ask the participants whether they would prefer the small groups to be mixed-sector or single sector (with, for example, those representing the community working in a group on their own).
Suggested process

**Step Four**
The next step is to get each small group to give feedback to the main group, and this is a point at which skilful facilitation may be required. Some groups may be shy at reporting their views, whereas others may express themselves more forcefully. At this stage, the direction the session takes will depend on the views of the group. If there is a consensus of opinion, the participants can now move on to the exercises on pages 28 to 31. In other situations, there may be conflicting opinions and perspectives between participants which will now need to be explored further.

**Step Five**
If there are differences of opinion within the group, it is essential to note that attempting to prove or disprove ‘the facts’ is unlikely to lead to any reconciliation: each participant will have his or her own perspective and though ‘the facts’ may change some views, people’s experiences will be different, depending on the angle from which they view the relationship between the partner agencies. It is more constructive to get participants to accept that perceptions are important.

**Step Seven**
It is suggested that at this point the group undertakes the exercises between pages 28 to 31. These will help the group to identify the sections of the community who have been involved to date and to work out how they have been involved so far. Working through these issues could very well uncover some of the underlying reasons for differences of opinion between the participants. For consensual groups too the exercises will be a valuable exploration of what could perhaps be hidden issues.

**Action Planning**
- If specific events or habitual working methods have been highlighted as sources of disagreement between the parties involved, what action can be taken to minimise their effects in the future?
- Can you encourage the parties concerned to review their methods for the future?
- Do you need to substantiate any criticisms or areas of concern by undertaking further research, commissioning opinion surveys or consulting other agencies, such as intermediary groups?

**Suggestions for further action**
- Commission research or a consultancy assignment to broaden the investigation if this session shows disquieting results
- Encourage senior personnel to lead any initiatives to build bridges and reconcile damaged relationships

**Cross-references**
- p16 The evidence that things may be going wrong
- p42 Reconciling conflicting demands
- p50 Making decision-making inclusive
Identifying the community stakeholders

When to use this process

- At any point in the partnership’s lifecycle in order to check that the key groups in the community have been included
- At the beginning of the partnership’s ‘start-up’ phase as a scoping tool

Suggested preparation

- Bring together a mixed group if possible, including voluntary sector and community representatives and public agencies
- Collect up available background data, e.g. maps of the area and local statistics

Suggested process

1. Define the geographical area in which the partnership operates, or is to operate.

2. List the themes or issues the partnership has been set up to address, or might want to address. Clarify the opportunities and constraints which affect this decision, for example, government policies, the availability of funding or staff resources, or the willingness of key partners (for example, the major public agencies) to support the initiative.

   (Bear in mind at this point that others may not agree that these choices are the right ones, or may not understand the funding constraints or policy decisions which have shaped the agenda - particularly local people, who are most unlikely to know about national or regional policy developments. This issue will be returned to in later sections).

3. On page 14, it was suggested that ‘the community’ could be seen as a collection of different groupings of people. The five main groupings are shown on the diagram below.

4. The primary task during this process is to be as specific as possible about the composition of ‘the community’ that is - or will be - affected by this partnership. The benefit of bringing a mixed group together to do this process is that a broader range of insights will be gained.

5. Using the maps, agency data and insight of the participants, draw up lists of the groupings within the community who are - or will be - affected by the partnership’s work, using the five main groupings shown on the left as the main headings.

6. The lists should include the beneficiaries and users, groups that are already working on these issues, potential contributors and those who could suffer a negative impact as a result of this initiative.

7. At this stage, aim to be as inclusive as possible: sorting will occur later.
Suggested process continued

8. Depending on the themes or issues on the partnership’s agenda at this point, other groupings may suggest themselves, and can be included. These could be groupings such as business people and their employees working in the area, tourists and visitors, landlords and so on.

9. When the lists seem complete (or you have agreed on further research that needs to be done) the participants can review them in order to identify some key targets for future activity:
   
a) Look at the list of ‘communities of interest’ you have generated. Of these groupings, which are the most disadvantaged or most likely to be socially excluded for economic, social, cultural or political reasons? Should the partnership be focusing particularly on the needs of these sections of the community?
   
b) Reviewing all your lists, are there ‘hard-to-reach’ groupings who are less likely to engage with the partnership, public agencies and with other community initiatives?
   
c) Are there any intermediary agencies or self-help groups who could tell you more about them or help you to reach out and draw them in?
   
d) Reviewing all your lists, are there groupings who are more likely to engage with the partnership, with public agencies and with each other in community-based activities?

10. Given that by now you have generated some extensive lists of community stakeholders, can you agree on the groupings who should perhaps have the highest priority for the partnership? Are there sections of the community who have a particularly high stake in the partnership’s key issues or themes, or who have particular need of the partnership’s assistance? On the other hand, are there groupings who are less likely to have a stake in this initiative? This whole exercise is not a way of ‘labelling’ or excluding particular groups: it helps to ensure the partnership can focus its resources in the most effective way and design appropriate consultation and participation processes for the future.

Action Planning

• Is there further investigative work to be done on community profiling and circumstances?
• Can other agencies assist you with this process?
• Who will take responsibility for any additional work, and when will it be completed?
• Do you need to write up the notes from this session to share or seek agreement with others?

Suggestions for further action

• Undertake this process as a consultative exercise with the community
• Test your conclusions with others
• Use the results of this process to start building partnerships with other agencies

Cross-references

• p 30 Understanding current patterns of participation
• p 38 Designing the initial consultation process
• p 40 Designing a consultation event
Understanding current patterns of participation

When to use this process

- At any point in the partnership’s lifecycle in order to work out if ‘the community’ is taking on all the roles in the partnership that it could be playing
- Specifically at the ‘start-up’ phase

Suggested preparation

- ‘Map’ the community and groups in the area to discover their existing patterns of activity and skills and competences
- Consult intermediary agencies and local community development workers

The more traditional approach for public agencies is to see ‘the community’ as users and beneficiaries of their services rather than as participants in the decision-making and management of those services. In the 1990s, partnerships built on public sector models from the 1960s and 70s when they also consulted their users about the services. As suggested on pages 12 and 13, the growing expectation is that partnerships will share far more influence and control with local people by involving them at every level and in every aspect of partnership working.

Community Development Foundation has suggested that on average, there are around three voluntary or community groups per 1,000 population, but that the propensity of people to get involved in community-based activities will differ between areas, depending on the social and economic circumstances of the local residents. There are also varying levels of willingness to engage with councils and other statutory organisations. The partnership could be dealing with a community in which there is a high degree of alienation. Alternatively, there could be a lively and vibrant community, which enables the partnership to build on high pre-existing levels of activity. Partnerships can be in danger of failing to harness this energy and commitment within the local community and voluntary sector, or of duplicating the self-help initiatives that already exist.

It is therefore essential that at least some of the participants in this process have a well-informed understanding of the communities in the area: their composition, the current levels of community-based activity, past and present partnership activity involving local people and local groups. If the area has never been ‘profiled’ or ‘mapped’ in this way before by the lead agencies, and if they cannot access the knowledge and expertise of other organisations that have done this kind of research, there is little to be gained from proceeding without first commissioning a community profile or map from either officers or a skilled intermediary or consultancy agency.

Suggested process

1. Undertake the exercise on pages 28-29 before starting this one, or clarify the geographical remit for the partnership and the themes for which it might gain funding.

2. The objective of this exercise is to gain an understanding of how the communities in the area are engaging with a whole range of initiatives - including the partnership - and the extent to which groups within the community have moved on from being passive ‘users and beneficiaries’ of services to play a more active role in designing, shaping and managing the initiatives which affect their lives. The methodology for this exercise will differ depending on the stage of development of the partnership.
Suggested process continued

3. Partnerships in the early start-up phase may not have begun yet to engage the broader community in consultations, and will therefore be focusing on pre-existing levels of community activity and engagement in voluntary, self-help and ‘civic’ issues by the people in the area. Partnerships already in existence will need to take account of both their own patterns of community participation and the general level of participation by the community in other voluntary, self-help and ‘civic’ activities.

4. The adjacent box outlines the roles that can be played in a partnership by local people. For existing partnerships, the first part of the process is to review the data, discuss and draw out the answer to the key question: ‘To what extent are the communities under discussion involved now in playing these five roles within the partnership and more generally in the area?’

Partnerships that are not yet established should ask: ‘To what extent have the communities under discussion been engaged to date in playing these five roles within other partnerships and generally in the area?’

5. During this assessment process, the patterns displayed by different sections of the community should be noted: are there some who are less likely to participate at the ‘higher’ levels, and if so, which.

6. What factors might have influenced these patterns of participation? What barriers exist, or might exist that would explain the levels and patterns shown?

7. Existing partnerships should consider if levels of participation in the partnership mirror the general levels of engagement by local people, or whether discrepancies suggest the partnership is not able to capitalise on community energies and enthusiasm - and if not, why not.

8. At this point, move onto the next exercise or the one on page 34.

Five roles for the community

Users and beneficiaries
of the activities and funds of the partnership. If this is the only type of community engagement in the partnership, it cannot be ‘counted’ as participation.

Advisers
to the partnership through their involvement in consultations, working parties and evaluations which seek their guidance and feedback.

Contributors to management
through membership of forums and steering groups that work alongside partnership staff supervising progress on partnership activities.

Decision makers
primarily through their membership of the partnership board. They can also be decision-makers if their views influence the strategic choices and other major decisions made by the partnership at key stages of development.

Deliverers
of projects and programmes on behalf of the partnership and as local successor bodies that are being developed to take over projects and programmes from the partnership.
Working together as partners

When to use these processes

- At any point in the partnership’s lifecycle in order to explore the potential for collaboration and co-operation between sectors and partner agencies
- Specifically at the ‘start-up’ phase

Suggested preparation

- For exercise one, work in a single-sector group
- For exercise two, bring together a mixed group, including representatives from all the sectors involved in the partnership

The aim of these two exercises is to examine the practical benefits of working together in partnership by exploring the strengths each partner (or potential partner) brings to the initiative, how these skills and resources can complement each other and how any assumptions, prejudices or territorial disputes which might damage partnership working can be addressed.

The exercise on this page is suggested for situations in which there have been frustrations between partner agencies, or where barriers to partnership working are being experienced. It is best undertaken in a single-sector / single organisation group, and it is strongly suggested that groups seek the assistance of a skilled facilitator.

Exercise One for single sector groups - Suggested process

Step One
The purpose of the exercise is to overcome the barriers to working with other partners. The first step is to ask: ‘What are our frustrations with the behaviours we observe from our partner organisations, or the other sectors involved in the partnership?’
The observed behaviours should be noted down.

Step Two
The next step is to assume that the other parties are not engaging in these behaviours in order to be obstructive or destructive, and to ask: ‘What are the good reasons that these other parties could have for acting in the way we perceive them to act? What could be the positive intentions behind these behaviours? Are there any factors which could explain these behaviours we observe?’
Record the thoughts of the group.

Step Three
The next step is to check that the other parties have really been given the ‘benefit of the doubt’ by asking:
‘Have we re-interpreted the motivations of the other parties in such a way that it puts them in a good light?’
Having checked this, the next question is:
‘How can we see these as strengths or assets for the partnership?’

Step Four
The final step in the process is to ask:
‘How can we reframe our relationship with the other parties so we acknowledge and respect any fears, reservations or barriers they might have?’
and
‘How can we benefit from these strengths and assets that the other parties bring to the partnership?’
Exercise Two for cross-sectoral groups - Suggested process

Step One
The purpose of this exercise is to look at the skills and resources each partner or potential partner can contribute to the initiative, and to undertake the first step, a mixed group should be split up into smaller sector-specific groupings or into single-organisation groupings.

Step Two
The second step is to ask each small group to answer the question: ‘As a sector or organisation, what are our particular strengths in relation to partnership working? What skills, experience or resources do we bring to the table that we think are particularly valuable contributions to the partnership?’ Each small group should note their responses on a sheet of flipchart paper.

Step Seven
The final step is to ask whether there are still any gaps in terms of the skills, experience and resources needed by the partnership and if so, which other organisations could contribute them? If the partnership were to ask them to contribute, what benefits could it offer them in return?

Step Three
The next step is to ask each small group to answer the question: ‘As a sector or organisation, what can’t we bring to the partnership table? What skills, experience or resources would we find it difficult to contribute to the partnership?’ Again, the responses should be noted down.

Step Six
The next all-important step is to consider what each party will get back in benefits in return for their contributions. The most stable basis for a partnership is an arrangement whereby the partners gain positive returns on their investments. The key question to answer here is: ‘If we contribute these skills, experience and resources, what will we get out of the relationship in return?’ The group must ensure there is a positive reason for all the parties to get involved. However, there are obviously a number of issues here about propriety, the need for a ‘transparent’ agenda and the appropriate use of public money which mean that ‘secret deals’ and financial rewards are not options.

Step Four
The fourth step is to bring the small groups back into a plenary session to talk through and compare and contrast the lists which each has generated. Step Five can be done in plenary session, or again in small groups.

Step Five
Ask the group(s) to answer two questions: ‘Where are there overlaps? How could these agencies collaborate with each other to create an even better result?’ and ‘How can we use the skills, experience and resources of the other organisations or sectors involved to complement our own or fill in our gaps?’
Where do we want to be?

When to use this process
- Whatever the partnership’s stage of development, use this exercise after the exercises on pages 26 - 31 as the starting point for deciding which other self-assessment exercises in this tool to use.

How to use the exercises below
- Undertake Part One before embarking on any further self-assessment exercises
- Undertake Part Two after undertaking the self-assessment process in order to create a framework for further action

Part One - Suggested process

By this stage, users of the self-assessment tool should have undertaken at least the exercises on pages 26 to 31. You may also have done one or both of the exercises on pages 32 and 33 and identified some symptoms of potential problems from the tables on pages 16 to 21.

These processes have helped you to explore past and present participation issues, but the all-important next step is to start looking to the future and the changes that could be made to address any problems that have been identified. This can be a challenge if poor relationships are very entrenched, but it is critical to encourage people to look forwards in a more positive way.

Step One
A very constructive way of generating a change process is to build a picture of the preferred situation so that those involved have clear goals to aim for. The first step in defining ‘where we want to be?’ is to ask the participants in the process to describe their aspirations for community participation and the future relationship between the partners. Generate and discuss a list of values, principles, good practice headlines, roles and practical outcomes that the participants would like to see, and seek a consensus on them within the group. Ensure that these are recorded as the partnership’s ‘vision’ for future community participation.

Step Two
This involves encouraging debate and building a consensus on three broad, forward-looking questions:
- What are the barriers we need to overcome? How could we overcome them?
- What else could we do to help along our vision and the positive factors we have identified?

Step Three
Sum up all the key issues from page 26 onwards, and now answer the key question:
‘Given the results of all our discussions so far, which exercises in this self-assessment tool should we now commit ourselves to undertaking?’

Tasks to undertake at this point
- Draw up a list of appropriate exercises to undertake, given the results of your work so far.
  (Please refer to the contents list and references on the ‘symptoms chart’ on pages 16 - 21.)
- Decide on a schedule for completing the exercises.
- Decide who will be involved in the process, paying particular attention to whom you will need to include in order to come to an objective and widely accepted set of solutions.
**Part Two - Suggested process**

At this stage, users will have completed a range of exercises from the self-assessment toolkit in response to the issues and problems they identified at the start of the process.

The next step is to generate an action plan to address these issues and problems. The ‘Tasks’ box below suggests some of the issues that could be addressed in such an action plan.

**Tasks to undertake at this point**

- Do we need to check again at this stage that the aspirations and outcomes agreed during these exercises match those of the communities involved, and if so, how will we achieve this?
- Can we express our aspirations and goals in terms of formal targets and performance indicators for the partnership?
- What are the milestones or target dates for the achievement of these goals?
- How will we ensure that our programme of further action is delivered?
- Who will be responsible for ensuring that the agreed goals are achieved?
- What resources do we need to put in place to ensure these plans are realised?
- When will we review progress and how will we measure it?

**Planning for the future**

As was suggested in the introduction, community participation is not a ‘one-off’ set of activities for a partnership: it is a process of continuous improvement. Having undertaken these exercises once, the partnership should not think it has fulfilled its obligations for the whole of the rest of its lifetime. The growth in the level and quality of community participation is a worthwhile subject for mainstream monitoring and evaluation, in the same way that issues about performance and spending are. A regular review process that tracks achievements and triggers renewed phases of activity shows that there is a genuine commitment from the partnership. Similarly, prompt responses to the symptoms of dissatisfaction convey the sense that the commitment is genuine.
Self Assessment Tools
Start-Up Phase

Topics

Designing the initial consultation process
Designing a consultation event
Diagnosing problematic consultation events
Reconciling conflicting demands
Building in funding for community participation
Securing agreement for the ‘big decisions’
Self Assessment Tools
Start-Up Phase

Topics

- Designing the initial consultation process
- Designing a consultation event
- Diagnosing problematic consultation events
- Reconciling conflicting demands
- Building in funding for community participation
- Securing agreement for the ‘big decisions’
Designing the initial consultation process

When to use this process
- At the beginning of the partnership’s ‘start-up’ phase as a scoping tool
- When consultation events are being designed later in the lifecycle, especially if key groups may have been excluded

Suggested preparation
- Collect up available background data, eg: local statistics and agencies’ information
- Identify community stakeholders (p28)
- Consult agencies that work in that area (geographical or on the relevant themes)

The aim of this exercise is to ensure that you are designing consultation events which can draw in the sections of the community you need to consult in the early stages of the partnership. It can also be used later in the partnership lifecycle when you need to design events which appeal to as broad a cross-section of the community as possible. The starting assumption is that although you might have official statistics (such as unemployment data) and information from public agencies on local factors (for example, crime rates or housing condition), this does not tell you all you need to know about what local people’s needs, aspirations or priorities are. You also need to ask local people directly what they think the partnership’s agenda ought to be.

Suggested process
1. The first step is to clarify the types of issues or themes on which the consultation will need to focus. This might be a single theme (for example, if this is an ‘action zone’ partnership dealing with a single issue like education or crime), or it might need to range over all the headline issues suggested by the statistics (if this is a neighbourhood regeneration partnership).

2. The second step is to identify which communities (or groupings within the broader community) need to be included within the consultation process, as suggested on page 28.

3. The most important part of this exercise is to be as specific and as sensitive as possible about the characteristics and circumstances of each of these groupings: ask what would encourage them to participate in a consultation and what barriers might prevent them from participating. Look in turn at each of the communities and think through the factors which could affect this.
**Suggested process continued**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encouraging / discouraging factors</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject matter</strong></td>
<td>Use of plain English and relevant community languages is essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different issues will be more of a draw for different sections of the community. Is there a headline issue or pithy way of putting it?</td>
<td><strong>Religious and cultural factors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venues</td>
<td>Such as festivals, timings and gender issues should be accommodated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The ownership, image and location of the venue will affect participation levels</td>
<td><strong>Fun!</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timings</td>
<td>Can you make this into a fun event, or offer food, entertainment or a popular character?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly affect which groupings are able to attend meetings</td>
<td><strong>Is it better / quicker to go to them?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will older people, those with disabilities and people with children be enabled to attend?</td>
<td>Can you go to people’s own events and meetings rather than always expecting them to come to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practicalities</strong></td>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will older people, those with disabilities and people with children be enabled to attend?</td>
<td>Are you setting up the event so you will respond to what people tell you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. It is inevitable that you will have to run a series of events in different locations, at different times and with different emphases and attractions. An effective process is one which draws in as many of the stakeholder groups as possible, not one which has the least number of events.

5. Consider whether there are intermediary agencies that can help you to reach the desired audiences, for example, tenants groups, self-help groups, voluntary agencies, social clubs, schools, youth clubs or community centres. How could they contribute to the process?

6. The other vital component in the design process is to clarify what exactly you want to get out of the consultation events you are scoping: please turn overleaf to explore this question.

**Action Planning**

- Have you identified all the communities, or stakeholder groups within the community, who need to be included in the consultation process, particularly the most hard-to-reach groups?
- How will you know you have included all the groupings who need to be consulted?
- Who will take responsibility for liaising with potential partner groups who could assist you?
- Do you need to start negotiating for more resources at this stage?
- Can you set some targets for inclusion, particularly for ‘hard-to-reach’ groups?

**Suggestions for further action**

- Organise meetings with relevant local groups to discuss how they might co-operate with your consultations
- Actively seek out groups you think could be hostile or reluctant to participate

**Cross-references**

- p28 Identifying the community stakeholders
- p40 Designing a consultation event
- p61 Handling meetings and team working
Designing a consultation event

**Good practice principles**

- Events must be tailored to their anticipated audiences
- Events must be tailored to enable you to achieve the task you are setting out to achieve
- The organisers must set out to help people to understand and participate

**Suggested process**

1. Create a statement which sums up the task you want to achieve in the event or the outcome you want from it (for example ‘generate a list of priorities for improving the physical environment in area x’, or ‘find out from young people what social facilities they would like to see in the area’)

2. Clarify who are the audiences you wish to attract to this event and review the factors which could put off this specific group from attending and the features that could attract them into participating

3. Think through what would be the most accessible ways to put information across or to gather in their views. Can you avoid or minimise the use of the printed word?

4. How can you make the event as interactive as possible?

5. How can you help people with language or literacy problems or disabilities to participate fully in the event?

6. How will you collect and record people’s contributions to the meeting?

7. Do you need a neutral facilitator or chair?

8. How will you record people’s names and contact details so you can contact them again in the future?

**Ideas to make events inter-active**

- **Exhibitions**
  - of photographs and sketches illustrating the problems or the potential remedies, or of ideas and concepts from elsewhere

- **Inter-active exhibitions**
  - giving people pens or sticky dots to mark their preferences or priorities next to the issues or options illustrated in the exhibition

- **3-D plans and models**
  - large, table-top models are used in ‘planning for real’ events, and people’s choices, problems and priorities are marked on them with post-it notes, pre-printed cards or small flags

- **Post-it note commenting and voting**
  - encouraging people to record their views in private to add to a wall display. These can be sorted by facilitators in order to cluster the issues by theme

- **Mind-mapping and drawing**
  - giving groups large pieces of paper and coloured pens and shapes to explore ideas, sequences of action and linkages

- **Small group discussions**
  - splitting audiences into small groups to talk about issues or themes with the assistance of facilitators and scribes

- **Video-boxes, entertainments, stalls**
  - creating a ‘carnival’ atmosphere during an open-day to engage larger numbers

- **Competitions**
  - for younger members of the community

- **Suggestion boxes**
  - with suggestion cards for completion
Diagnosing problematic consultation meetings

Public meetings are often dreaded by officers in public agencies for a variety of reasons:

- they can be unpredictable in terms of the numbers, the kinds of attenders and the ‘mood’;
- previous attempts at meetings have resulted in hostility, or a breakdown in ‘order’;
- the results of the meeting did not seem to justify the expense or the organisational problems;
- “the people round here just won’t come out to meetings”
- “the wrong kind of people come to the meetings”

![Diagram](image)

Figure nine: Diagnosing the potential root causes of a problem using a ‘fishbone’ diagram

**Suggested process**

1. Sum up the nature of the problem in a short phrase. This is the ‘symptom’ which shows that there is an underlying problem. Note down the phrase in the fish head, as illustrated above.

2. Brainstorm the possible underlying reasons which might have caused the problem to happen. Write each problem at the end of a fishbone, as illustrated above.

3. Look at each possible underlying reason in turn, discussing the evidence you have to believe it is true. If necessary, do some further research. Note your findings on the diagram.

4. When you have fully investigated the problem, decide what actions you could take to correct the problem in the future.

**Action Planning**

- Decide how you will know that the problem has been solved / is being resolved.
- What will a successful meeting look like, sound like and feel like?
- Decide what you will do to try to put the problem right, and who will take responsibility for it.
- Agree some targets for improvement and timescales by which they will be achieved.
- Set a review date on which you will assess progress and try new remedies, if necessary.
Reconciling conflicting demands

There is no easy answer to this problem. As has been pointed out before, the community is made up of myriads of individuals, communities of interest, self-help initiatives, groups, factions and cultural differences. To be able to come up with a unanimous view on an issue, or on which issues deserve the highest priority can often be impossible. This leaves partnerships in the delicate position of having to reconcile conflicting points of view.

Sometimes in these circumstances, the public agencies become the final arbiter. The reasons given may be that they ‘own’ the assets in question (the housing, for example), or that out of all the voices expressing an opinion, theirs is ‘the most democratic’, or because one of the options fits better with a bigger strategy they have devised. However, local people (and often funders as well) are increasingly unlikely to accept that one of the partners can have the final word. This means that partnerships need to go ‘the extra mile’ to reconcile conflicting demands in a way that maintains trust, confidence and continuing co-operation between all the parties concerned.

Suggested process

There is no surefire way of moving people into 100% agreement, but ways can be found to handle disputes in such a way that even the ‘losers’ are more likely to feel that they were treated fairly. The searching questions to ask about the process of reconciling differences could be these:

1. Do all the parties believe that they had a fair opportunity to put across their views?
2. Do all the parties feel that their views were registered and taken seriously?
3. Did anyone in a senior position use their rank to rebut or reject views they didn’t agree with, or was everyone treated equally by the process?
4. Did the people who were facilitating the negotiations ensure that the positive intentions behind all the parties’ points of view were brought to light?
5. Did the people who were facilitating the negotiations establish what were the common concerns and points of agreement between the parties concerned as a basis for a compromise?
6. Were all the possible compromises explored?
7. Would the parties involved accept some ‘conditions’ or ‘compensation’ in return for accepting a compromise?
8. Did all the parties understand and agree that the decision-making or arbitration process was a fair one?
9. In all honesty, is it always the same party who ‘loses’ the argument? If so, what are the underlying reasons for this?

Checklist

- In the history of decision-making does one party consistently lose out? What can you do to ‘level the playing field’?
- Can you agree a process for reconciling differences which everyone thinks is a ‘fair’ and equitable process?
- What will make all the parties perceive that the decision-making process is fair?
- Is there a respected and independent person who could act as a go-between or chair the proceedings?
- Do you have an appeals procedure?
### Building in funding for community participation

**When to use this process**
- During the ‘start-up’ phase as a scoping and budgeting tool
- At the ‘evaluation’ or ‘renewal’ phases as part of the following year’s planning and budgeting activities

**Suggested preparation**
- Consult community involvement or development experts who can advise on likely costs and timescales
- ‘Map’ the community and groups in the area to discover existing competences

**Key considerations**
- When ‘the community’ is fully participating in the partnership, it will be participating in all of the five roles outlined below (unless the partnership itself does not deliver programmes)
- Budgets and timescales must be crafted to allow the partnership to ‘enable’ the community to play these roles and develop their skills to play these roles

**Five roles for the community**

**Users and beneficiaries**
of the activities and funds of the partnership. This is the most basic level of engagement.

**Advisers**
to the partnership through their involvement in consultations, working parties and evaluations which seek their guidance and feedback.

**Contributors to management**
through membership of forums and steering groups that work alongside partnership staff supervising progress on partnership activities.

**Decision makers**
primarily through their membership of the partnership board, but also when periodic consultations are taking place about strategic choices and other major decisions.

**Deliverers**
of projects and programmes on behalf of the partnership and as local successor bodies that are being developed to take over projects and programmes from the partnership

**Suggested checklist**

*Looking at each of the five roles in turn:*

**Communication and publicity**
Have you built in funding for publicity materials, leaflets, newsletters and liaison with local media and community-based intermediaries?

**Consultation**
Do core budgets include the costs of on-going consultation with individuals involved in all these roles (for both big ‘events’ and a lower-key series of meetings and working parties)? Do project costings include funding for regular consultation activities by project managers and project deliverers?

**Human resources**
Do budgets include resources for staff time spent in consultation, liaison, communication and community support? Do budgets include sums to cover the expenses and outlays required to support volunteers?

**Capacity building**
Is there funding for training, consultancy and other kinds of skills development?

**Community-based activity**
Will there be a ‘small grants’ pot available?
Securing agreement for the ‘big decisions’

On page 7, the thought-processes and tasks which are undertaken at the start-up phase of the partnership were reviewed and summed up in the diagram repeated below.

The partnership may devote time, energy and resources to the initial research and to consultation to determine the needs and priorities of local people, but then, classically, a small group of staff from one of the major agencies involved will go back into their office to draft the documents needed to secure key signatures and submit funding bids. For the community, these documents often seem to bear little resemblance to the raw materials which went into the process.

Securing agreement from the broader community and from the community signatories to the partnership’s paperwork can be a matter of verifying to them that the official language, the jargon and any forbidding tables included do express the stated priorities of local people, but just in different language. However, if key objectives have been changed, this will be discovered and challenged.

Suggested checklist

1. Look at your draft mission statement and ‘Strategic Objectives’ (the headlines describing the aims and goals of the partnership): their tone, wording and content.

2. If you had been a participant in one or more of the consultation meetings to date, would you recognise the statement as a summary of the key priorities and issues you had expressed? If you were an inexperienced jargon-buster, which words and phrases would mystify you?

3. Take your mind back to the time when you first attempted to read the instruction manual which came from the funder. If you were still an inexperienced reader of bids, what kind of assistance would you need to navigate your way around the document and find the items that concerned you? What could you say to people to ‘decode’ the jargon in the documents?

4. Can you create an opportunity to explain these wordings to people, and secure their endorsement (for example via a consultation event or a ‘plain language’ key to the text)? Have you given people enough time to read the document, ask questions and respond to you?

5. To what extent do the mission statement, strategic objectives and funding schedules reflect the priorities of the community stakeholders? If they do not, the mismatches will be revealed continually throughout the lifetime of the partnership as the discrepancies are uncovered, and will lead to repeated conflict. If there are mismatches, they should be openly discussed now.
Self Assessment Tools
Planning Phase

Topics

Designing participation into the structure
Making decision-making inclusive
Enabling community reps to be representative
Designing a capacity building strategy
Preparing a community participation strategy
Measuring and evaluating participation
Self Assessment Tools
Planning Phase

Topics

Designing participation into the structure
Making decision-making inclusive
Enabling community reps to be representative
Designing a capacity building strategy
Preparing a community participation strategy
Measuring and evaluating participation
Designing participation into the structure

Page 8 describes the tasks and activities involved in the planning phase of partnership development. Getting community participation right very much involves designing a partnership structure which includes community representation in all its levels, layers and functions. This section suggests how this can be done.

When to use this process

- During the partnership planning phase
- As part of a review of participation levels
- In response to community criticism at any stage that they are excluded from decision-making processes or groups

It is just not feasible to aim to include the thousands - or even millions - of people who make up the community in a partnership’s structures on a day-to-day basis.

At various points in the lifecycle, the partnership will want to go out to broader consultation to gain input and feedback from as many as possible of the individuals and groups who make up its ‘community’. Between these times, however, it needs to find effective and efficient ways to include ‘representatives’ of the community in its decision-making, management, delivery and monitoring structures. We return on page 52 to the complex issue of ensuring that the representatives who participate in these tasks are indeed representative of the broader community. This section focuses on the functions a partnership has to perform, and how the structure enables it to fulfill them.

The functions a partnership structure exists to fulfill

A partnership needs to fulfill four major functions:

1. Governance — Involving leadership, direction, decision-making and strategy
2. Management — Including planning, monitoring, evaluating and reporting
3. Consultation — Ensuring the partnership is accountable to its community
4. Delivery — Achieving the selected outputs and outcomes

(Some partnerships may not engage directly in delivery, though they will take an interest in the programmes others are delivering, and may be able significantly to influence them.)

During the planning stage, a structure is designed which will enable the partnership to fulfill these functions. There are some good practice principles that should guide the design of this structure.

Good practice principles

- The structure chosen should enable the partnership to perform its functions effectively
- The partnership should be accountable to all its stakeholders, and the structure chosen should enable and assist it to answer to the people who have a stake in its work
- For full community participation to exist, the community needs to be represented in all four of the functions of governance, management, consultation and delivery
Making the structure accountable to the community

On page 2, it was suggested that there are five different types of partnership. Strategic partnerships and some service providers networks may not have all the component parts listed below because they do not directly deliver programmes and projects, but the majority of partnerships will have the full range of these component parts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The component parts of a partnership</th>
<th>Consultative forums and working parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Board</strong> The body which provides leadership and direction, oversees the strategy, makes decisions on behalf of the partnership, and is responsible for performance</td>
<td>Bodies which enable a wider group of stakeholders and their representatives to engage with decision-making, planning, management, performance monitoring and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>An Executive Committee</strong> Or a series of Board sub-committees who take a more detailed interest in planning and performance management on behalf of the Board</td>
<td><strong>Project deliverers</strong> Working under contract or via grants on the delivery of projects and programmes, achievement of outputs and outcomes and on monitoring and reporting results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Staff Team</strong> Who manage the partnership’s activities, monitor and report on performance and may undertake some delivery</td>
<td><strong>Programmes and projects</strong> The mechanisms through which activities are delivered and results achieved</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between them, these component parts enable a partnership to perform its core functions of governance, management, consultation and delivery.

More old-fashioned views suggested that the community should be involved (at most) only in the consultation function. Now it is expected that governance, management and delivery should also be opened up to community participation. In order to ensure that the community can be an ‘equal power-holder’ within the partnership and exert influence over all its activities, its representatives need to be involved in some way in all levels, layers and functions of the partnership.

This means ensuring that there is community representation:

- at Board level
- on Board sub-committees or the executive committee
- on forums, working parties and steering groups and in wider consultative processes
- within the staff team
- within the delivery function (as deliverers themselves and as influencers of delivery agents).

Designing the structure to make it all its component parts accountable to the community is one of the most complex but critical aspects of the planning process, and it is rarely achieved overnight.
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: A SELF ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Building representation into partnership structures

In order to make the partnership accountable to the community and ensure that the community is represented in all its component parts, it is essential for each partnership to tailor-make its own structure to fit its own circumstances. It is also critical to examine how the various parts of the structure fit together: for example, how the community forums influence decision-making; and how the community influences delivery and management.

It might be helpful to see the partnership as a kind of machine. Raw ingredients such as resources, community needs and aspirations, and skills go into the machine, and a process then takes place which creates the finished product - the desired outputs and outcomes. When a partnership designs a structure for itself, it is actually designing a process which includes the community in specifying and delivering benefits to local people.

Suggested process

Step One
Work out who are the key stakeholder groups in your community (refer to the exercise on p28).

Step Two
Decide if there are sections of your community who particularly need to be included, eg because their input is particularly needed or because they could otherwise be excluded.

Step Three
Discuss what combinations of forums and working parties would most effectively enable the relevant stakeholder groups to participate in the work of the partnership. These could be a mix of:
- geographical forums (eg neighbourhood-based)
- interest group forums (eg young people)
- sector-based forums (eg voluntary and private)
- themed working parties (on subjects like crime, and on tasks like appraisals).

Check that the combination chosen seems to offer encouragement for the key stakeholders to join.

Step Four
Think through how the various forums and working parties will connect to the Board in order to enable their advice and input to influence Board decisions:
- How will they send representatives to the Board?
- What will the reporting lines be?
- How will the forums’ work feed into the Board?

Step Five
Think through what should be the composition of your Board: who should be represented there and in what proportions. Refer to Boxes A and B on the facing page for key questions on this issue.

Step Six
Discuss how the community representatives will relate to the staffing structure and day-to-day partnership management tasks.

Step Seven
Think through how the community and voluntary sectors can become involved in delivery themselves and how they can influence the work of other delivery agents. (See Box C on facing page)

Step Seven
Think through how you can increase the chances of local people being recruited to paid jobs within the partnership.

Step Nine
Consult on your ideas, encourage feedback and take others’ perspectives into account. See Box D.
**Key design considerations**

**BOX A: Board composition**

There are two major issues to address:

1. What is the ‘right’ composition for your Board? Should community representatives be in an outright majority? What should the size of their ‘bloc’ be vis-a-vis the other partners represented?

2. What kinds of community (and / or voluntary sector) representatives should be on the Board? Board representatives should always be linked up with their ‘constituencies’ in a formal way, but does the partnership organise the linkages, or does it look for members who have their own networks and linkages to the constituencies in question? See Box B on the use of ‘intermediaries’

**BOX B: The use of ‘intermediaries’**

It is usually more appropriate for the partnership to organise open elections so that local people can vote for the individuals they want as representatives. However, it may be acceptable to appoint or co-opt at least some intermediary groups (such as voluntary or self-help group representatives) to speak on behalf of specific stakeholder groups. The latter can be a realistic and effective option when:

- the partnership is working at a strategic level across a very large geographical area;
- volunteers from some key stakeholder groups are most unlikely to put themselves forward at this stage;
- election results could or have excluded important minority interests
- the agency perspective is wanted as well as community views

**BOX C: Community-based delivery**

How can the partnership enable more local community and voluntary groups to gain, and succeed in delivering, contracts for projects or programmes of activities?

What needs to be in place for local groups to succeed in this?

Could the partnership encourage more community-based activities through grants?

**BOX D: Setting people up to succeed**

When designing representative systems, it is essential to ask the following questions:

1. What will help people to fulfill these roles?

2. What will hinder them from fulfilling these roles effectively?

3. What can the partnership do to help them to succeed and eliminate the hindrances?

4. How do policies and procedures assist?

**Suggestions for further action**

- Review how well your structures and processes are working every year, and be willing to adapt them in response to comment
- Ask the people involved to comment on all aspects of their effectiveness

**Cross-references**

- p28 Identifying community stakeholders
- p50 Making decision-making inclusive
- p52 Helping community representatives to be representative
- p55 Designing a capacity building strategy
Making decision-making inclusive

Participation in different levels of decision-making

There are, of course, different orders of decision-making within a partnership. Some decisions are major ones which affect the whole course of the partnership’s work over many years. The many types of decisions made by partnerships are listed in the box below: many have a significant impact.

Most of the major decisions are made during the start up and planning stages and they can prove difficult to change later on. Some of these are to do with the allocation of resources, as this has a major impact on the way in which the partnership does its work. Other are concerned with the structures, policies and procedures that are put in place. There is no real reason why these cannot be changed later, but staffing considerations and inertia can make adaptations difficult.

Two factors can limit community influence over the planning decisions (outlined on page 8). One is the difficulty involved in engaging people’s interest in what might seem to be the minutiae of organisational design. The other is the difficulty of predicting how things will turn out in practice.

There are four major considerations when working out how the community can exert an equal influence at all levels within the partnership:

a) can the community influence important decisions as well as minor ones?

b) are suitable mechanisms in place through which community views can be channelled?

c) do partnership timetables allow for consultation on draft plans and proposals?

d) how can the partnership enable a growth in influence and participation over time?

When to use this process

- During the partnership planning phase
- As part of evaluation or renewal phases
- In response to community criticism at any stage that they are excluded from decision-making processes or groups

Types of decisions

- Culture and values
- Mission and strategic objectives
- Leadership and direction (priorities)
- Investment in people development
- Targeting of resources
- Contents of delivery plans
- Allocation of resources
- Structures and staffing
- Internal policies and procedures
- Choices on delivery agents and methods
- Design of projects and activities
- Management style
- Performance management methods
- Monitoring methods
- Evaluation criteria

Suggested process

1. If you are in the planning phase, draw a flowchart diagram which shows how you envisage decisions will be made in your partnership. Show the stages the decision will go through, and who will be involved at each stage.

2. If the partnership is at a later phase of development and you are reviewing the decision making process, draw a flowchart which shows how decisions are generated, what stages they go through, and who is involved before the final decision to implement them is made.
Suggested process continued

3. Look at the decision-making flowchart that is illustrated on the right. It is suggested as a starting point for discussion.

4. How closely does your flowchart resemble the one illustrated here?

5. Are there stages on the flowchart here that are different or are missing from your own process?

6. Are different kinds of proposals treated in different ways? If so, which decisions are they and how do they differ?

7. In particular, are you missing out the consultation or feedback stages shown?

8. Ask critically whether these omissions mean that stakeholders are prevented from contributing to decisions which affect or could affect them in a significant way.

9. How could you make the decision-making process more inclusive for these various types of decision?

10. Discuss how you can schedule decision making to allow time for people to contribute.

11. How will you ensure that everyone understands the decision-making process?

12. Who will be responsible for bringing about these changes, and how (and when) will you check that the changes are being effective?

Cross-references
- p55 Designing a capacity building strategy
- p52 Enabling community representatives to be representative
- p64 The decision-making trail

A decision making model

Stage
1. A proposal is generated

2. The partnership has a mechanism through which it can consult on this proposal

3. The proposal is circulated for comment to the relevant consultative groups

4. Either the proposal is adapted or the feedback is attached to the paperwork

5. The paper goes to the board for decision

6. The board defers the decision or sends back the proposal if reactions are adverse or consultations have not taken place

7. The proposal is passed if consultation results have approved it

8. Implementation plans are discussed and agreed with those affected by them

9. Success criteria are agreed with those affected by the proposal

10. Responsibilities and review dates are agreed
Enabling community reps to be representative

Ensuring there are places for community representatives on the board, the working parties, committees and forums is only the first step in the process of making the partnership accountable to its stakeholders in the community. The community representatives must also be able to perform effectively in their representation role. This section explores the factors which influence the effectiveness of the representation systems.

The factors which influence the success of community representatives

1. Who they are and how they became representatives (their legitimacy)
2. How well their roles are defined and how well they and others understand their roles
3. How clearly their responsibilities are spelled out and communicated
4. The extent to which the partnership co-operates with them and supports their roles
5. The practical support and back-up provided by the partnership

When to use this process

• During the partnership planning phase
• As part of a review of participation levels
• If the representation system is ineffective or the representatives are struggling to cope with their responsibilities
• In response to community criticism at any stage that their representation arrangements are ineffective or unfair

Factor One: Legitimacy

Community representatives need to be credible spokespeople for their ‘constituents’ who need to see them as legitimate choices as spokespeople.

On page 49, the use of co-opted or selected intermediaries was explored. This can be one way in which legitimacy and credibility are undermined: it is up to ‘constituents’ to decide whether their representatives are indeed representative of their interests and whether they are accountable. The partnership can help to gain representatives more credibility and accountability through the practical support it provides (see Factor Four), but great care needs to be exercised by the partnership if selection and co-option are the preferred methods of arranging community representation.

The election route generally offers greater levels of credibility and accountability.

Step One

Work out who are the key stakeholder groups in your community. (If necessary, undertake the exercise on page 28.)

Step Two

Work out what combinations of forums and working parties the partnership needs in order to enable the community to influence all its operations (as described on page 48).

Step Three

Work out the routes through which people will become Board members as representatives of the community (as described on page 48). Will they have places as representatives from the forums and working parties, or will they be directly elected by local people, or both?

Step Four

When the broad outlines are endorsed by the people involved in the consultations, design and organise election processes.
**Factor Two: Well-defined roles**

One of the biggest factors which contributes to volunteer ‘burn-out’ and general dissatisfaction with performance is badly defined roles. It helps both the representatives and the people they represent if the roles and responsibilities are clearly defined:

- Be clear exactly what the roles entail
- Define clearly which stakeholder groups the representative is meant to be representative of and accountable to
- Communicate these facts widely

**Factor Three: Spell out the tasks involved**

By creating the equivalent of job descriptions for representatives, much greater clarity can be achieved, including in expectations.

- Work out with the representatives themselves and colleagues the specific tasks the role entails, the relationships involved, the reporting lines and the skills which need to be deployed.
- Draw up a written role definition for wide circulation, spelling out these tasks and explaining the limits and boundaries.

**Factor Four: Co-operation and support**

Community representatives can only perform their roles if the budgets, workplans and timetables ‘fit’ with the work they have to do and the partnership board and staff actively co-operate to make things happen.

- How do managers and co-ordinators work with representatives to help them to be accountable and representative?
- Does the timetable give representatives the opportunity to liaise with the groups they are supposed to represent?
- Do budgets - the communications and consultation budgets, for example - help the representatives to perform the tasks expected of them?
- Do the Board and staff respect and respond to the representations made by the people performing these roles?
- Or are mixed messages going out about how important and influential the representatives are to the partnership?

**Factor Five: Practical back-up**

The partnership needs to think through the practical factors which could help or hinder the representatives from performing their roles successfully.

These factors can be very straightforward:

- written materials
- administrative support
- photocopying facilities
- meetings organisation
- secretarial support for meetings
- an address for correspondence
- assistance with phone bills
- reasonable and timely expenses

or they can be more complex:

- quality information
- training and capacity-building
- linkages and connections
- rules on confidentiality
- moral support

What are the factors which will help and hinder the representatives in the performance of their roles? How can the partnership support and back-up the representatives?
Building and using local skills and expertise

‘Capacity building’ is a freely-used term which has no universally accepted meaning. For some it is synonymous with ‘community development’ and means building levels of trust, interest and understanding among local people. Others interpret it as ‘training’, in other words equipping people and groups with the knowledge, confidence, skills and competence to fulfill defined roles.

In this tool, it is used in the second, more functional sense to describe the process of preparing people to play roles in the partnership. However, partnerships can also play a critical role in the development of broader levels of trust, interest and understanding within the community, and may indeed need to do so before they can engage residents and smaller groups in their activities. In particular, communities are unlikely to participate at a strategic level or in issues like economic development without considerable encouragement and enablement.

Partnerships will also need to consider how they can build these general levels of interest and understanding. In undertaking this, and in designing and delivering more focused capacity building programmes, they should also consider how they can use the contacts, skills and expertise which already exist within the community and voluntary sectors. Local development agencies such as Councils for Voluntary Service and others are often already building capacity locally.

Suggested process

**Using local skills and expertise**

**Step One**
Identify the voluntary and community groups that operate in this geographical area or in the fields or issues the partnership covers.

**Step Two**
Survey and investigate these groups to ascertain their memberships, client groups and areas of specialist skill and expertise.

**Step Three**
Assess whether these groups offer a ready-made consultation, advisory, training and / or development mechanism for the partnership.

**Step Four**
Discuss with the groups concerned the basis on which the partnership could tap into their specialist knowledge, networks and skills.

**Building local skills and expertise**

**Step One**
Having surveyed local groups and their memberships, client groups and specialisms, investigate with them the mutual benefits of devising joint capacity building and community development programmes for themselves and their members and clients.

**Step Two**
Discuss the partnership’s capacity building and community participation strategies with local groups and local development agencies and seek their insights and advice.

**Step Three**
Consider how local groups could access partnership funds to develop their own skills and their clients’ and members’ levels of interest, understanding and involvement.

**When to use this process**

- During the partnership planning phase
- As part of a review of participation levels
- At any phase of partnership development in order to tie in the partnership’s work with communities with voluntary sector activity in support of the community
Designing a capacity building strategy

When to use this process

• During the partnership planning phase
• As part of a review of participation levels
• If community participation is limited to involvement as users, beneficiaries and consultees and not in other roles
• In response to community criticism at any stage that they are not being enabled to play a greater role in the partnership

Suggested preparation

• Read pages 12 - 15
• Identify the community stakeholders (p28)
• Familiarise yourself with the five roles the community can play in a partnership (see p13 and p43)
• Identify the knowledge, skills and practical support needed by community representatives to play these roles (p52 and p53)

A strategy is a route map which gets you from A to B. The capacity building strategy is therefore a route map, or a plan, which develops the capacities of the individuals and groups concerned from their current state (Place A) into some other, preferred state (Place B). Preparing a capacity building strategy involves the same process as for any other strategy: the tasks are to establish your baseline position (A), decide where you want to be instead (B) and then work out the route.

Before going on, it is worth defining ‘capacity building’. This is a deliberately vague collective noun which describes any activity which could increase the knowledge, skills, competence and confidence of a person or a group. Hence it can include training (formal and informal), mentoring, coaching and any other learning and confidence-building opportunities. Capacity-building is not just for the community: all partners need development. Note also that there is little point in building capacity if people do not then have the opportunity to take on responsible roles.

Suggested process

**Step One**
Define where you want to be (your goal - Place B)

- In order to do this, you must have decided:
  a) the roles you wish individuals and groups to play in the partnership (p46 - 49)
  b) the knowledge, skills and competence needed to perform these various roles in an effective and confident way

**Step Two**
Analyse your current position (your baseline, or Place A)

- In order to do this, you must determine:
  a) the individuals and groups whose capacity you want to build (p13)
  b) the current levels of skills, knowledge and competence

(This can be done by undertaking a skills audit and research)

**Step Three**
Understand the size and nature of the gap between A and B

- The size and nature of the ‘gap’ between A and B will give you indications of the:
  • likely timescales
  • potential methods to use
  • resourcing levels needed
  • level of commitment required

**Step Four**
Work out your strategy to get from A to B

- The answers from the previous steps allow you to work out your strategy, workplan, timescales, budgets and organisational arrangements.

Note that the strategy may need to include several phases of development over more than one year and that it will need to include partners from all sectors and all ‘levels’ of the partnership.
Preparing a community participation strategy

Community participation is now a strategic objective in its own right for many partnerships, but having a participation strategy will enable all partnerships to develop the quality and extent of community participation in a logical and structured way over their lifetimes. Before embarking on the task of preparing a strategy, however, some essential groundwork needs to be done, and the box alongside suggests which exercises in the self-assessment tool will need to be undertaken first.

Preparing the components of the strategy
- Undertake the self-assessment exercises on pages 26 to 34
- p43 Building in funding for community participation
- p46 Designing participation into the structure
- p52 Enabling community reps to be representative
- p55 Designing a capacity building strategy

Suggested process

1. The strategy development process involves the same steps as were suggested on page 55 on designing a capacity building strategy:

   - **Step One**
     - Define where you want to be (your goal or Place B)
   - **Step Two**
     - Analyse your current position (your baseline, or Place A)
   - **Step Three**
     - Understand the size and nature of the gap between A and B
   - **Step Four**
     - Work out your strategy to get from A to B

2. If the tasks outlined in the ‘Suggested Preparation’ box above have been completed, Steps One, Two and Three are essentially complete, and Step Four is partially done. The community participation strategy brings all these strands together into a single framework with defined goals, plans of action, timescales and budgets. However, before compiling this data into a strategy document, it is worth pausing to review the coherence and effectiveness of the ideas which have been collected.

Key Question One
What are the key themes or headings that should be included in the strategy? These could be couched in terms of the principles suggested by Yorkshire Forward’ - inclusiveness, communication, influence and capacity development - or in terms of partnership roles and responsibilities

Key Question Two
Does the strategy look beyond the pragmatic needs of the partnership for active volunteers to consider what kinds of knowledge, skills, roles and responsibilities would be useful in the wider community in the longer term? How will the strategy make a broader contribution to the area?

Key Question Three
How does the strategy address the real issues of shared influence and power within the partnership? Does it address the learning and skills needs of all the partners and the operational factors which help or hinder participation (such as the partnership’s policies and procedures)?

Key Question Four
Does the strategy ‘go for growth’? Does it set out a range of measures which are well-structured and resourced, with realistic timescales, which move the participants forward so they can competently and effectively fulfill the roles envisaged? How will evaluation inform its evolution over time?
Measuring and evaluating participation

It has frequently been suggested that if partnerships were evaluated as stringently on participation outputs and outcomes as they are on financial measures of performance, then the efforts to include the community would be undertaken far more strenuously.

It is worth setting targets and outputs for this aspect of partnership activity, but it is essential to make sure that the measures devised provide for a well-rounded assessment.

**Suggested use and preparation**

- Use during the partnership planning phase when preparing delivery plans
- Collect drafts of documents containing strategic objectives, outlines of projected activities, schedules of outputs and key performance indicators
- Include community representatives and project deliverers in the process

**Suggested process**

1. Collect up copies of your draft outlines and plans, and review them.

2. To what extent are community participation objectives, outcomes and targets built into the partnership’s plans? Do they permeate all the planned activities, or are they an ‘add-on’ or an entirely separate set of objectives?

3. Are any of the partnership’s ‘key performance indicators’ concerned with the participation of the community?

4. Can community participation objectives and targets be built into the full range of partnership programmes and activities?

5. How sophisticated are your measures of community participation? Are targets concerned only with numbers, or with the engagement of beneficiaries and users, or do they also focus on the types of broader outcomes, qualitative changes and process issues shown in the panel on the right?

6. In order to demonstrate vital and well-rounded community participation levels, what new measurements could you use?

**Examples of indicators of participation**

**Numerical targets**

- The numbers of people participating or benefiting from involvement in initiatives
- The number of groups supported or funds allocated to community-based projects

**Targets indicating growth**

- The growth in numbers or percentages of participants year on year
- The increased propensity of excluded groups to become involved

**Measures of outcomes**

- Local residents access paid posts
- Increased turnover or expansion for local community and voluntary groups
- Improved outcomes for minority groups

**Qualitative changes**

- Skills development as a result of capacity building initiatives
- Growth in numbers of community / voluntary sector delivery agencies and in contract value
- Higher satisfaction levels of local people

**Assessment of the process**

- Levels of involvement in forums, working parties and partnership structures
- Audits of the extent to which policies and procedures are inclusive
- Assessments of attitudes towards - and understanding of - partnership operations
Self Assessment Tools
Implementation Phase

Topics

- Diagnosing problems
- Handling meetings and team working
- Making policies and procedures compatible
- The decision making trail
- Communication
- Capacity building
Self Assessment Tools
Implementation Phase

Topics

Diagnosing problems
Handling meetings and team working
Making policies and procedures compatible
The decision making trail
Communication
Capacity building
Diagnosing problems

One of the most demanding aspects of any situation is making sure that the root causes of any problems experienced are accurately defined. A chart of ‘symptoms’ is provided on pages 16-21, but this is a problem-solving methodology to check that an appropriate solution stems from an accurate diagnosis.

When to use this process

- At any time as a diagnosis tool in response to difficult situations
- Specifically during the partnership’s implementation phase

Suggested process

1. Write down a statement of the problem

2. Note down that this describes place ‘C’ on the diagram to the left. We set out from place ‘A’ intending to get to place ‘B’ (our goal, or the situation we wanted to find ourselves in), and instead, we have ended up in a different place (a situation ‘C’ in which we have problems we didn’t want, or foresee that we would have).

3. Focus initially on this place ‘C’ (the place we did not want to be), and pose a number of questions about it:
   1. What exactly is not working?
   2. When exactly is this a problem?
   3. Precisely who is involved?
   4. What precisely are they doing?
   5. Is there anything which is working well?
   6. How exactly did we get from A to C?

4. Turn the focus onto place ‘B’ (the place we intended to be instead), and again pose a number of precise questions about it:
   1. What specifically did we want?
   2. Who specifically was to be involved?
   3. When and where was it to happen?
   4. How exactly did we see it working?

5. Since we are no longer at our starting point ‘A’, our plan of action now needs to change: we now need a route to get us from ‘C’ to ‘B’, rather than from ‘A’ to ‘B’. The next step is to work out what we need to do to overcome the problems we don’t want (C) and to bring about the desired situation (B). We therefore need to ask, ‘What specifically needs to change in order to bring about the desired situation ‘B’?’

6. Generate a list of ideas, and then select of the most appropriate ones by asking the question, ‘Which of these potential solutions will make the biggest difference?’

7. The last part of the process is to seek broader agreement for the proposed solutions.
Handling meetings and team working

Much of the work of partnerships takes place in meetings, and therefore it should be no surprise that these are where tensions and conflicts become most apparent. Partnerships hold meetings for a wide range of different purposes, and if they do not work, it is worth exploring how to make them work better.

**Suggested process**

1. Virtually everyone has had the experience of attending ‘good’ meetings or participating in effective teams, so a useful starting point for this exercise can be to generate a list of the qualities and behaviours which define productive meetings and team working. This list of qualities and behaviours should avoid generalisations and imprecise value-laden words, such as ‘excellent communication’, and aim for precise factual descriptions, such as ‘listening to what other people say’ or ‘making sure everyone has the chance to speak’. This list provides a template or model for a positive meeting or team working experience.

2. There are some good design principles for meetings and people working in teams. For you, what are the organisational principles that would enable your group to hold positive and effective meetings? Some of these principles could be:
   - clarity about the desired outcomes
   - planning and preparation
   - objective and positive chairing
   - understanding the task in hand
   - allowing time for discussion and decision-making

3. Agree the organisational principles and the qualities and behaviours which will help to keep your meetings and team situations positive and effective.

4. A whole variety of different things can go wrong with meetings and team working situations, and it may be worth spending some time defining what exactly appears to be going wrong. Very often, the pattern that meetings take is very predictable, as participants fall into habitual ways of handling issues and problems.

5. Observed behaviours can mask a wide variety of root causes, so it is useful to look beneath the surface to try to discover what the symptoms really demonstrate.

6. How will you ensure you make progress and bring about continuous improvement? One method is to ask participants to complete anonymous feedback forms at the end of each meeting giving scores for factors like levels of understanding, clarity of purpose, feelings of being included and ability to participate. Changes in the scores can be measured and used to stimulate further improvement.

**Suggestions for further action**

- Check out any assumptions with participants: tensions and conflicts can stem from the very different perceptions different people can hold about what happens in meetings and teams.

**Cross-references**

- p16  The evidence that things may be going wrong
- p40  Designing a consultation event
- p42  Reconciling conflicting demands
- p50  Making decision-making inclusive
Policies and procedures

It can be difficult to achieve consistency between on the one hand, the principles and stated values of the partnership, and on the other, the policies and procedures adopted to carry out the partnership’s work. It is on a practical, day-to-day level that communities can be excluded from the partnership.

When the partnership is in its implementation phase, it is on the whole engaged in conducting the tasks outlined in the diagram below (which is taken from page 9).

The key question

How does the partnership organise itself so the community can participate in management and delivery? How do its policies and procedures help rather than hinder this?
SELF ASSESSMENT TOOLS: THE IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

**Suggested process**

1. The model below is based on a typology of ‘Styles of Community Engagement’ by Graham Johnson of True-North and shows five different approaches to the development of work plans and internal policies and procedures. Which of these five approaches most closely resembles your partnership’s style and approach to these tasks?

   ![Five different approaches to developing work plans and policies and procedures]

   **‘Telling’**
   The officers have a plan. They implement their policies and procedures.

   **‘Selling’**
   The officers have a plan. They explain what it is. They implement their policies and procedures.

   **‘Testing’**
   The officers have a plan. They share it with the stakeholders and might adapt it as a result. They implement their policies and procedures.

   **‘Consulting’**
   The officers consult on the options available. Based on the comments received, they then decide on the best option and implement the policies and procedures.

   **‘Co-creating’**
   The officers develop a plan alongside the stakeholders and work with them to decide the way forward. The stakeholders participate in the implementation of the policies and procedures.

2. What were the reasons for the partnership officers adopting this style and approach? There could be several, including a lack of willingness and capacity on the part of the community to engage with the tasks at the time they needed to be done.

3. Construct a checklist of the policies and procedures the partnership has put in place or is in the process of developing. Looking in turn at these policies and procedures, what practical measures could be developed to enable the representatives of the community to participate in the management and supervision of the partnership’s work programme?

4. How is the partnership going to move towards the approaches depicted on the right?

5. The issues which may need to be taken into consideration are listed below. How will the partnership address these issues in order to ‘set people up to succeed’ in the tasks involved?

   - Information needs
   - Capacity building
   - Protocols for project deliverers on participation
   - Advice and support
   - Mentoring
   - Assessing improvements in performance

**Suggestions for further action**

- Make management and delivery skills a key component of the capacity building strategy
- Look beyond partnership needs to the longer term capacities needed by the community

**Cross-references**

- p46 Designing participation into the structure
- p50 Making decision-making inclusive
- p52 Enabling community representatives to be representative
The decision making trail

This process is based closely on a process suggested by Danny Burns and Marilyn Taylor in ‘Auditing Community Participation: An Assessment Handbook’ to test whether issues that are of importance to the community are discussed and acted upon. Burns and Taylor advise that several decisions should be examined to test the outcomes thoroughly. It is also worth considering the significance of the community issues that are taken forward.

When to use this process

- During the partnership implementation or evaluation phases
- At any time as part of a review of the effectiveness of representation and consultation mechanisms
- In response to community criticism at any stage of the way the partnership agenda is set

Suggested process

1. Bring together or consult a range of people who have an insight into the ways in which decisions are made within the partnership. This could include members of the board and the staff team and community representatives within the partnership structures.

2. Select a small number of issues which have emerged from consultations or from the work of community and voluntary sector forums or working groups which the partnership was asked to consider and take a decision on.

3. Review each of these decisions in turn, using the diagram opposite to follow the trail of questions. If there are no recorded instances or memories of this type of event happening, the question to ask is whether there are any lessons or learning points from this? For example, are representations from the community being ‘headed off’ before they enter any formal decision-making processes?

4. Review a number of decisions to check whether the examples considered are representative of what generally tends to happen in the partnership, and whether there is a pattern.

5. Are any patterns emerging from the review? For example:
   - Are there common factors involved in every case?
   - Of what order of magnitude are the issues concerned? Are there any major issues on which the partnership shifted, or do the favourable decisions involve only minor issues?
   - Do positive decisions actually get followed up and implemented, or do they tend to run into the sand?

6. Looking at the patterns which may have emerged, what could the partnership do to ensure that it becomes more responsive to the issues and concerns of the community?

7. What is the proposed course of action? Who will be responsible for taking forward these ideas? What timescales will be applied? When will this issue be revisited and reviewed?
Suggested process continued

The decision trail diagram

Select one item that the community successfully put on the partnership agenda for discussion and decision

What had to happen for the partnership to accept that this was an issue - describe what was involved in this process

If there are no recorded instances of this happening - or no memories of it - how could this situation have come about? What are the lessons or learning points from this?

How was the decision made and by whom?

If the decision was positive, what had to happen before the decision could be implemented (eg were there any blockages to overcome)?

If the decision was negative, does that point up any lessons or learning points for any of the parties involved?

Was the eventual outcome different from the original request, and if so, why was this?

How was the decision communicated?

Was any feedback sought from the sponsors of the idea on how successful the decision and its implementation had been for them?

Was there any right of reply, appeals procedure or opportunity for renegotiation?

Have there been any broader consequences as a result of this decision? What have the wider impacts been?

What lessons or learning points for the partnership does this trail of events point up?
Communication

Communication is often seen as leaflets, newsletters, annual reports and the monthly distribution of paperwork to members of the board, forums and working parties of the partnership, but it needs to be seen as an essential core process with far-reaching implications for the community.

**When to use this process**

- At any phase of partnership development
- Specifically during the partnership implementation or evaluation phases

**Good practice principles**

- Communication is about making sure the partnership’s affairs are ‘transparent’ to observers and participants
- Communication is about ensuring that people can participate and effectively take on their roles and responsibilities within the partnership
- Communication is about being accountable to the people who have a stake in the partnership

**Suggested process**

1. This exercise consists of asking some searching questions about the partnership communication policy to discover the extent to which it fulfills the good practice principles outlined above and on page 67, and devising new processes and methods in order to meet these core aims.

2. The key initial questions to ask about the current communication process are:
   - To what extent does it make our affairs transparent to those who need or want to know about our work?
   - To what extent does it enable people to participate in the partnership and effectively fulfill their agreed roles and responsibilities?
   - To what extent does it make the partnership accountable to those who have a stake in our work and the outcomes we achieve?

3. The next step in the exercise is to work out:
   - How can we become as transparent as we can to the people who need and want to know about our affairs?
   - How can we enable people to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as effectively as possible and enable them to participate fully?
   - How do we make ourselves fully accountable to all our stakeholders?

4. Some of the additional questions which might usefully be considered before deciding on the next steps are:
   - How do we gain a better understanding of stakeholders’ information needs?
   - How can we make our communication more user-friendly, accessible and digestible for each group of stakeholders?
   - How can we make it easier for people to communicate with us in response?
   - What measures can we put in place to assess the effectiveness of our methods?
Key aspects of the communications programme

**Consultations**
Periodically, the partnership will want to set up consultations which involve the broadest range of people and groups in the area: in between times, a smaller number of regular participants will be involved in formal and structured meetings.

How will the communication process ensure that the broader group are kept informed of progress between the more open-access events?

How will the communication process ensure that the broader group do not become excluded from the substantive decisions that are made by the group who are involved in the formal partnership structures?

**Back up community representatives**
Community representatives need to be seen as part of the broader communication mix of the partnership, with essential roles to play as conduits of information to and from the community.

How could the officers who are responsible for generating information assist the community representatives to fulfill their roles and responsibilities towards their communities more effectively and efficiently?

How do the officers responsible for generating and distributing information work with the community representatives to ensure that clear, timely and consistent messages go out to the broader community?

Does the partnership offer practical back-up to community representatives in the form of administrative and secretarial support, photocopying, post and telephone services and the production of written materials?

**Reaching the whole community**
Some groups are harder-to-reach and it is generally those who are socially excluded who are less likely to engage with the partnership.

Are communication methods tailored to the needs and circumstances of the audiences who need to be included, and do they take account of the barriers that could prevent them from participating?

Are a range of methods employed, including outreach to the groups who are less likely to come forward?

**Assisting partnership operations**
Does the communication process help people to understand the structures, methods, rules and decision-making processes?

Does the communication process enable the different parts of the partnership structure to work together smoothly, effectively and in a timely, well-informed way?

**Suggestions for further action**
- Devise some measures of the effectiveness of communication policies and methods and review how well they are performing each year in order to adapt them as necessary

**Cross-references**
- p38  Designing the initial consultation process
- p40  Designing a consultation event
- p52  Enabling community representatives to be representative
Capacity building

Suggested preparation

- Undertake the self-assessment exercises between pages 26 and 34
- Diagnose any problems using the model given on page 60
- Look at the approaches to development outlined on page 63

When to use this tool

- At any phase of partnership development
- Specifically during the implementation and evaluation phases
- At any time when participation levels are lower than anticipated

On pages 55 and 56, exercises were suggested in order to help partnerships to develop capacity building and community participation strategies, and partnerships can use these at any phase in their development to scope out their overall plans of action.

However, capacity building programmes that are fully-fledged and inflexible from day one of the new financial year give partnerships very little room for manoeuvre if capacity building needs then emerge during the course of the year. It can therefore be very useful to adopt two additional measures which provide greater flexibility. One is to set aside small sums to fund quick responses to emerging needs. The other is to look at how capacity building can be built into day to day operations as part of the partnership’s normal working methods.

Suggested process

‘On the spot’ enabling measures

Looking back at how situations and events have panned out over the last six to twelve months, what relatively quick and inexpensive remedies could you have put in place to deal with issues as they arose?

Generate a list of ideas which might have helped you to overcome the obstacles as they emerged. How many of these ideas could have a wider application? Can they be built into your day-to-day ways of working in the future?

Some suggestions on ideas

- Small enabling grants, quickly released with fewer grant conditions attached
- The provision of neutral, unbiased technical support and advice
- Induction notes and handbooks
- On the spot coaching and tuition
- Different chairing styles in meetings

Supportive policies and behaviours

What kinds of policies and behaviours - if introduced or reinforced - would contribute to the development of knowledge, skills, levels of confidence and capacities?

How can this become part of partnership culture?

What are the kinds of attitudes and behaviour which will encourage the growth of people’s skill and confidence levels? Can these be translated into policies and codes of conduct that make them part of the explicit culture of the partnership?

Some suggestions on ideas

- Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory policies and training for all partners
- An expectation that all parties will engage in capacity-building and development
- Supportive recruitment, selection and career progression policies
- Contract conditions for delivery agents
Self Assessment Tools
Evaluation Phase

Topics

- Involving the community in evaluation
- Evaluating quality, outcomes and processes
- Undertaking wider reviews of participation patterns
Self Assessment Tools
Evaluation Phase

Topics

Involving the community in evaluation
Evaluating quality, outcomes and processes
Undertaking wider reviews of participation patterns
Involving the community in evaluation

**Key considerations**

There are a number of essential points about evaluation that need to be well appreciated.

The first is that once an annual programme of work is in mid-flow, it is probably too late to make major changes to the criteria against which its performance will be judged.

It is not reasonable to judge someone’s performance according to standards they did not know in advance would be applied. There is also a distinct possibility that they will not have collected the information needed to prove or disprove their performance.

Success measures therefore need to be agreed before a programme starts so that ‘a baseline study’ can be undertaken (an analysis of the situation before the work is underway) and so that the appropriate information collection systems can be put in place. The evaluation process can then make better-informed analyses of how successful the programme has been.

The second point is that if an evaluation process is to ask people for their views on how successful an activity or programme has been, the evaluator would be well-advised to ensure they are given enough information to be able to give a reasoned verdict. If this is not done, the evaluator may have to put up with (and explain) quite arbitrary results which are not based on an adequate knowledge of the facts and are therefore too subjective to be helpful.

The third point is that partnerships can prove to everyone that their results are honest and truthful only if their evaluations are neutral. If a single agency carries out all the functions shown on the diagram below, it is attempting to be both judge and jury, both poacher and gamekeeper. It has a vested interest in making sure the results look good, and it is in a position to ‘rig the game’.

Therefore, in order to demonstrate that the results are objective, the partnership needs to design a system that splits these roles between different parties.

As the ultimate litmus test of success for a partnership is whether the beneficiaries think there have been positive benefits for them, and both they and the other stakeholders believe that there have been changes for the better, it seems entirely appropriate for the partnership to include the community in at least deciding what the definition of ‘success’ will be, and evaluating the results.

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**When to use this process**

- To review the inclusiveness of the current evaluation process
- In order to design the following year’s evaluation process
- Specifically during the partnership’s start-up and renewal phases when evaluation systems are being designed

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**Being judge and jury**

If one agency performs all these tasks, it can nearly always prove that it is a success

1. Makes the decision
2. Designs the project
3. Allocates the resources
4. Delivers the work
5. Monitors the work
6. Evaluates the results
**Suggested process**

**Evaluating an existing evaluation process**

1. Looking at the key questions in the panel below, to what extent do you currently involve the community in all these parts of the process?

2. How much influence does the community have on the process? Is this enough, or do you need to do more?

3. Does your current evaluation process:
   - make you accountable to all your stakeholders?
   - measure all the changes you should be measuring?
   - prove that your approach is inclusive and participative?

4. How could you redesign next year’s evaluation process to make you more accountable, more responsive, more inclusive and more transparent to your community stakeholders?

**Designing a new evaluation process**

Obviously, evaluation systems have to set out to monitor and evaluate funders’ and partners’ stated objectives, but the other crucial questions at the start of the design process are:

1. How do you really test whether or not you are achieving your stated aims and objectives, and not just your stated outputs?

2. How do you ensure that you measure the things which really matter to the people you are here to benefit?

3. Looking at the panel below, how can you ensure that the community can participate in, and influence, all these parts of the process?

4. How will you get the right information to people to enable them to participate?

**Designing an evaluation process**

**Who decides on the design of the process, ie:**

- what is evaluated
- what constitutes good performance
- how things are evaluated
- how information is collected and from whom
- who is consulted
- who is on the evaluation team
- who undertakes the evaluations
- how the results are approved and accepted
- how the results will be acted upon

**What does the partnership evaluate**

- What kinds of changes are measured?
- What types of measures of performance are used? (See pages 57 & 72)

**Who is involved in evaluation**

- Who is asked to contribute their views?
- Whose success measures are used?
- Who validates the results?
- Who is informed of the results?

**What are the outcomes of evaluation**

- How are the results fed back?
- To whom are the results fed back?
- Does the partnership learn from the results?
- Are the results acted upon?
- Do they inform the future programme?
- Do they lead to wider participation in the evaluation process?
Evaluating quality, outcomes and processes

Suggested preparation

- Collect up monitoring forms and other documents which give information on key performance indicators and targets
- If possible, undertake a short survey to ask people what their criteria for success are: what results really matter to them?
- Look at the types of indicator on page 57

When to use this process

- To review the priorities of the current evaluation process
- In order to design the following year’s evaluation process
- Specifically during the partnership’s start-up and renewal phases when evaluation systems are being designed

The easiest kinds of success measure to set up and use - for both funders and those in receipt of the funds - are outputs (the numbers and percentages of things achieved) and value for money (the cost per output). However, these give only a partial picture of the success of an initiative, and for the beneficiaries and stakeholders they can often be the least meaningful kind of measurement. For community stakeholders, the title of the old song, “It ain’t what you do, it’s the way that you do it” is often far more to the point.

Suggested process

1. Review the formal partnership documentation you have collected, and ask “whose objectives?” are expressed in the key performance indicators, outputs and data collection forms.

2. Based on your knowledge of what people have said during consultations and any other research you have done into people’s aspirations for the partnership, what are the things which are really important to local people?

3. Is there a large gap between what people say really matters to them, and what the monitoring and evaluation system sets out to collect and measure?

4. What methods could the partnership use to assess performance against these other criteria?

5. How will the partnership show people that it has recognised their priorities, listened to their views and responded to them?

What do people really want?

If people are asked what kinds of changes they really want to see as a result of partnership working, they are most likely to talk about quality, outcomes and processes, rather than the number of new jobs created or hectares redeveloped.

The kinds of measures of success that will probably be mentioned are:

- Qualitative improvements in local social conditions, economic circumstances and environmental conditions
- Changes that are sustainable over time and don’t disappear when the partnership does
- What happens to people in the medium term in terms of their life opportunities
- How much they trust or don’t trust the board and staff team of the partnership
- Whether the partnership and its project deliverers listen to them with respect and respond to their needs and aspirations
- Who got the money and resources
Undertaking wider reviews of participation patterns

Suggestions for further action

- Look at the table between pages 16 to 21 - ‘The evidence that things may be going wrong’. Many of the problems which are expressed later in the partnership lifecycle have their origins in the partnership’s start-up and planning phases. If any of the symptoms seem familiar, look at the suggestions in the ‘possible root causes’ column and use the contents page to guide you to an exercise which addresses this issue.

- Partnerships undertake ‘mid-term reviews’ and often commission other broader pieces of research into their impact and effectiveness. Occasionally, funders ask for these evaluations to be done if there is cause for concern about the partnership’s performance. Why not undertake an evaluation of the partnership’s overall progress on community participation? The ‘cross-references’ box below suggests some of the exercises in the self-assessment tool you might use as the basis for a wider review of this kind.

Cross references

The exercises below are the ones it may be particularly useful to include in an evaluation process. They may not be set out here in a way that they can directly be used for evaluation purposes, but the questions and issues they raise may suggest some lines of enquiry for a review of your partnership’s effectiveness in terms of community participation.

- page 26 ‘Where are we now?’ - for a general assessment of the relationship between the partnership and its community stakeholders
- page 30 Assessment of patterns of community participation in the partnership
- pages 38, 40, 66 Reviewing the effectiveness of consultation and communication processes
- pages 50, 64 Assessing the inclusiveness and transparency of partnership decision-making processes
- page 43 Reviewing the allocation of funding to community participation and capacity building activities
- pages 53, 68 Assessing the effectiveness of the support offered to community representatives by the partnership
- page 55, 68 Assessing the impact of the capacity building strategy
- page 57 Reviewing the effectiveness of the community participation strategy
- page 63 Assessing the extent to which policies and procedures support or detract from community participation
Self Assessment Tools Renewal Phase

Topics

Devising the renewal strategy
Capacity building for succession planning
Self Assessment Tools
Renewal Phase

Topics

Devising the renewal strategy
Capacity building for succession planning
Devising the renewal strategy

**Suggested preparation**

- If the partnership is in the start up phase, check that there is a strong conception or vision of where it wants to be by the end of its lifetime
- If the partnership is underway, review and evaluate the success of its programmes and activities to date

**When to use this tool**

- At the start-up phase to help to devise the succession plan
- On an annual basis to redraw the strategy for the coming year ahead
- In the last 18 - 24 months of the partnership’s life to prepare the succession plan and the handover process

**Succession planning**

No matter how long their own funding is available, partnerships need to think about succession planning. How will their good work be continued after the end of the formal funding period? How will their successes be preserved (sustained) in the medium to long term? Who will pick up the baton from the partnership agency? Partnerships are asked to think about this from day one, but they need to return to the subject towards the end of their funding period to ensure that they genuinely have realistic and viable succession plans.

The emphasis now is very much on gearing up the community and voluntary sectors to take over at least some of the responsibilities, and on getting public agencies to assimilate the lessons learned from the partnership and, in response, to change their conventional ways of working.

**The annual renewal process**

Partnerships devise a strategy for their whole lifetimes, or for three to five year periods at a time, but each year they need to review how far they have come with their workplan, and based on that analysis, what their plan of action for the following year needs to be. When they started out, many partnerships had a low base of community participation, and their strategy did not consider how community roles and responsibilities could be grown year on year. However, the annual renewal process gives partnerships the opportunity to recast their programmes, budgets and structures to enable more participation from their communities in the 12 months ahead, and beyond that.

Depending on the area, this can be ‘demand-led’ - in other words, resulting from pressure from local people and groups for more responsibility and more influence - or it can be led by the ‘suppliers’ - the partnership consciously setting out to develop the skills and confidence, and the roles played by local people and groups. In the first instance, the partnership needs to be responsive to community aspirations. In the second, the partnership needs to take on a coaching role. In both cases this involves defining the extended roles that could be played, working out how to enable people to perform them effectively and providing the resources to encourage and assist people to take them on.

**The key considerations**

**Succession planning**

- What legacy does the partnership want to leave behind in the community for the future?

**Annual renewal process**

- How do we move forwards on the knowledge, skills, confidence and roles of local people?
Leaving a legacy

Both partnerships nearing their closure date and those working on their annual renewal strategies can usefully begin by thinking about the legacy they want to leave behind for the community.

Suggested process

Step One for all partnerships
Start by discussing:
“What do we want to see the community doing after the partnership has gone to carry forward and maintain our achievements and to make further progress?’

The box below suggests some of the activities and roles in which they might be engaged.

An active and vibrant community might be

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users and beneficiaries</th>
<th>Deliverers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of agencies which continue to provide vital services to local people</td>
<td>of projects and programmes as community-based successor bodies that have taken over (some of) the work of the partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisers and participants</th>
<th>Owner managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>within agencies that take over some of the partnership’s programmes in the area</td>
<td>of new organisations and facilities endowed by the partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision makers</th>
<th>Sources of community benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>about what happens in the area through their membership of the boards or steering groups of community, voluntary and partnership agencies operating in the area</td>
<td>as community and voluntary groups whose stability and skills have been increased by the partnership’s capacity building work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step Two for all partnerships
The second question partnerships can usefully consider is:
“What do we need to encourage public agencies and other mainstream service providers to do to support and encourage these patterns of participation?’

Step Three - for partnerships preparing their succession plans
The next step for these partnerships is to discuss and agree:
“What do we need to do to enable the community to take on these roles and activities in the future and to persuade the public agencies and others to support this process?’

The box below suggests a few ideas for this.

Developing community roles for the future

- Capacity building local groups
- Increasing the number and size of contracts awarded to local groups
- Planning a transfer of assets
- Setting up shadow structures
- Using connections and influence to get senior commitments to change
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: A SELF ASSESSMENT TOOLKIT FOR PARTNERSHIPS

Suggested process continued

Step Three - for partnerships preparing their next annual plan

The next step for these partnerships is to discuss and agree:

‘What do we want to achieve in terms of community participation in the coming year?’

There are two sets of factors to consider in answering this question:

• ‘How do we build on our current levels and patterns of participation in a realistic way?’
• ‘How do we move closer to the goals we defined when we thought about the legacy we might leave behind us?’

The box below outlines the roles and responsibilities members of the community and local groups can take on within the partnership. It will be useful to think about how progression is possible in all of these roles.

Five partnership roles for the community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users and beneficiaries</th>
<th>Advisers</th>
<th>Contributors to management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>of the activities and funds of the partnership. As such, how can they be active participants?</td>
<td>to the partnership through their involvement in consultations, working parties and evaluations which seek their guidance and feedback.</td>
<td>through membership of forums and steering groups that work alongside partnership staff supervising progress on partnership activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision makers</th>
<th>Deliverers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>primarily through their membership of the partnership board, but also when periodic consultations are taking place about strategic choices and other major decisions.</td>
<td>of projects and programmes on behalf of the partnership and as local successor bodies that are being developed to take over projects and programmes from the partnership.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step Four - for all partnerships

The next step for all but newly created partnerships is to think through which elements of their current community participation programme could contribute to future development, and whether new components should be added:

• ‘Which programmes and activities were effective and had positive benefits?’
  ‘What made them effective and beneficial?’
  ‘How can we build on their success next year?’

• ‘Which programmes and activities did not go so well?’
  ‘What were the factors which undermined their success?’
  ‘What could we do next year to improve their effectiveness?’

• What new programmes and activities do we need to create to help us achieve our goals?
### Suggested process continued

#### Step Five - for all partnerships
There are a number of key questions partnerships need to address at this stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Budgets and resources</strong></th>
<th><strong>Sharing influence and power</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What funds and resources should be allocated to the community participation strategy for the coming year? Should a certain percentage of the budget be allocated to community-based projects and activities? How can other kinds of resources be built into the annual workplan?</td>
<td>Do the ideas put forward represent progress in terms of shared influence and control for the community? Do some aspects of partnership operations need to be updated to assist greater participation? Do the skills and understanding of other partners need to be enhanced?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Inclusiveness</strong></th>
<th><strong>Capacity building</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there groups and sections of the community who are not participating to the extent they could be? Do our patterns of representation reflect the profile of the community? Do we need to do more to encourage some groups to participate? In which case, what should we be doing?</td>
<td>Are we looking beyond the immediate needs of the partnership to consider what kinds of skills, knowledge and competences will be useful in the wider community in the longer term? What could the partnership do to build the capacities and the stability of community and voluntary groups?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Step Six - for all partnerships
Having defined where the partnership wants to get to, the next step is to go through the remaining steps towards preparing a strategy, as suggested on page 55:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Stage One</strong></th>
<th><strong>Stage Two</strong></th>
<th><strong>Stage Three</strong></th>
<th><strong>Stage Four</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Define where you want to be (your goal or Place B) (done)</td>
<td>Analyse your current position (your baseline, or Place A)</td>
<td>Understand the size and nature of the gap between A and B</td>
<td>Work out your strategy to get from A to B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cross-references

The exercises listed below are ones which could contribute to the forward planning process during the renewal phase, as they explore issues which could be relevant as part of the action planning for the future.

- pages 38, 40 Designing consultation events (community aspirations for the renewal or succession strategy are particularly important to consider)
- page 46 Designing participation into the partnership structure
- page 55, 68 Designing a capacity building strategy / Capacity building issues
- page 56 Preparing a community participation strategy (an alternative approach to the one used here)
- page 72 Evaluating quality, outcomes and processes
Capacity building for succession planning

Capacity building is usually interpreted as activity undertaken to develop community skills, but it is important to think in terms of capacity building for all the partners.

It is important for partnerships to think not only of their own needs for community participants, but also in terms of building the capacity of community groups and local voluntary groups to take on a wider role in their area in the medium to long term. However, the inability of local groups to take on these roles is often caused by the unwillingness of other agencies to share responsibility, or a lack of awareness on their part about how their actions - or inaction - can frustrate community aspirations in this respect.

In terms of succession planning, then, partnerships need to think about both sides of the coin: the readiness of local people and groups to assume the roles and responsibilities, and the readiness of other agencies to allow and encourage them to do so.

**Suggested process**

1. Having undertaken the three steps on page 77, you will have defined the roles it is envisaged the community will take on after the partnership closes down and discussed the actions which are needed to enable the community to play them effectively.

You will also have thought through how to encourage the relevant agencies to support and encourage these developments. This completes stage one on the chart below.

2. Comparing and contrasting the aspirations of the community and the attitudes and approaches of the agencies concerned, how much of a gap is there between the two positions?

3. How will the partnership set about selling the benefits of these changes to the agencies concerned? How will the partnership negotiate a new set of relationships for its successors?

4. What will the partnership do to secure the resources required to sustain these plans? What fundraising does it need to do now? What future funding deals should it be negotiating?

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**Stage One**

Define where you want to be (your goal - Place B)

- a) The future roles & responsibilities of community & voluntary groups
- b) The future support and endorsement by major agencies

**Stage Two**

Analyse your current position (your baseline, or Place A)

- a) How prepared now are groups to take on these tasks?
- b) How likely are the major agencies to support & endorse this scenario?

**Stage Three**

Understand the size and nature of the gap between A and B

- a) What is the shape and scope of the capacity building needed?
- b) How likely are the major agencies to support & endorse this scenario?
- d) What kinds of shifts are needed from the agencies?

**Stage Four**

Work out your strategy to get from A to B

Your strategy, budget, timescales, campaign methods, senior level commitment, funding promises required for the future to bring about these goals.

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## References

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>‘Effective Partnerships for Voluntary and Community Groups’ by C Clark, published by Civic Trust, London, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘A Fruitful Partnership’, as in footnote 1 above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘Defining and Measuring Social Exclusion’ by C Miller &amp; E King, Management Briefing published by Office for Public Management, London, 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>A variation on CDF’s model suggested by C Clark in ‘Effective Partnerships’ - see footnote 2 above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>‘Regeneration and the Community’ published by CDF as in footnote 8 above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>‘Styles of Community Engagement’ by G Johnson, True North, undated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Adapted from Burns and Taylor’s Decision Trail in ‘Auditing Community Participation’ - see footnote 4 above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>Based on Steve Skinner’s five roles for the community in regeneration, which suggests that one of these roles is to be ‘a source of general community activity’. ‘Building Community Strengths: A Resource Book on Capacity Building’ by Steve Skinner published by Community Development Foundation, 1997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reading list

Sherry R Arnstein  

The Audit Commission  

Alan Barr & Stuart Hashagen  

Danny Burns & Marilyn Taylor  

Michael Carley  

Michael Carley et al  

Gabriel Chanan  

Caroline Clark  
Effective Partnerships for Voluntary and Community Groups, published by Civic Trust, London, 1999

Caroline Clark  

Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation  

PIEDA  

Derrick Purdue et al  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher and Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Exclusion Unit</td>
<td>Preventing Social Exclusion, published by The Cabinet Office, 2001</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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