



National Standards

for

Community Engagement



Introduction

The National Standards for Community Engagement are good-practice principles designed to support and inform the process of community engagement, and improve what happens as a result.

They were originally launched in 2005 and since then they have been used to support community engagement, and user involvement, in Scotland in areas such as community planning and health and social care. They have been widely accepted by a range of practitioners as key principles for effective practice.

During 2015/2016, the National Standards for Community Engagement were reviewed and updated. The aim of this review was to reflect the developing policy and legislation relating to community empowerment in Scotland, and to build on the growing range of practice. The review process was very inclusive and drew on contributions from a wide range of community organisations, third sector (voluntary) organisations and public sector bodies.

This document sets out the National Standards for Community Engagement in a new context. It describes each Standard in detail and gives examples of how the National Standards can be used. For links to a range of support materials and resources, please visit www.voicescotland.org.uk.

What are the National Standards for Community Engagement?

The National Standards for Community Engagement are clear principles that describe the main elements of effective community engagement. They provide detailed performance statements that everyone involved can use to achieve the highest quality results and the greatest impact.

The National Standards for Community Engagement are not designed to replace existing community engagement or participation frameworks. They are intended to act as a central benchmark and reference point for best practice. They are designed to reflect the developing policy relating to participation, engagement and community empowerment in Scotland.

The **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015** has a specific focus on promoting effective engagement and participation to help communities achieve greater control and influence in the decisions and circumstances that affect their lives.

The National Standards for Community Engagement are important in supporting organisations in putting the Act into practice. They can be used to shape the participation processes of public bodies as well as shape how community organisations can involve wider community interests.

Who are they for?

- **Public sector bodies and elected representatives**

to help them plan how to involve communities in shaping local plans and services, identify who should be involved, and make sure that the community engagement process is fair and effective.

- **Third sector organisations and community groups**

to help them involve their members or the wider community in shaping the services they deliver, and to make sure that they accurately represent members' or communities' views in other decision-making processes.

- **The private and independent sector**

to help agencies and businesses to involve and work with the community in planning developments and designing services.



What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a purposeful process which develops a working relationship between communities, community organisations and public and private bodies to help them to identify and act on community needs and ambitions. It involves respectful dialogue between everyone involved, aimed at improving understanding between them and taking joint action to achieve positive change.

Community engagement is supported by the key principles of fairness and equality, and a commitment to learning and continuous improvement. Good quality community engagement is:

- **effective** – in meeting the needs and expectations of the people involved;
- **efficient** – by being well informed and properly planned; and
- **fair** – by giving people who may face additional barriers to getting involved an equal opportunity to participate.

Community engagement is a process which provides the foundation for:

- **shared decision-making** – where communities influence options and the decisions that are taken;
- **shared action** – where communities contribute to any action taken as a result of the engagement process; and
- **support for community-led action** – where communities are best placed to deal with the issues they experience and are supported to take the lead in providing a response.

What are the benefits of good community engagement?

Good community engagement is not an outcome in itself, but is intended to lead to better democratic participation, better services and better outcomes for communities.

The outcomes of good community engagement include the following.

- The way in which public services are planned, developed and delivered is influenced by, and responds to, community need.
- People who find it difficult to get involved (for example, because of language barriers, disability, poverty or discrimination) can help to influence the decisions that affect their lives.
- The various strengths and assets in communities and across public and private sector agencies are used effectively to deal with the issues communities face.
- New relationships are developed between communities and public sector bodies which build trust and make joint action possible.
- There is more influential community participation in:
 - » community-based or community-led social and economic development activity;
 - » the way public authorities design and deliver services; and
 - » policy, strategy and planning processes.

The National Standards for Community Engagement

Each of the National Standards for Community Engagement includes a short headline statement, a set of indicators to show progress towards meeting each standard, and some examples of good practice.

The following terms are used throughout the National Standards for Community Engagement.

- ‘We’ refers to the leaders or organisers of the community engagement process.
- ‘Partners’ are any organisation or group who is involved in planning or delivering the community engagement process.
- ‘Participants’ are all of the people or groups who are actively involved at any level throughout the community engagement process.
- ‘Community’ is a group of people united by at least one common characteristic, including geography, identity or shared interests.



Inclusion



We will identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement.

How will we know we have met this Standard?

- The people and groups who are affected by the focus of the engagement are involved at the earliest opportunity.
- Measures are taken to involve groups with protected characteristics (see below) and people who are excluded from participating due to disadvantage relating to social or economic factors.
- Participants in the community engagement process commit to continued two-way communication with the people they work with or represent.
- A wide range of opinions, including minority and opposing views, are valued in the engagement process.

Protected characteristics

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of one of the protected characteristics, which are as follows.

Age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation



Inclusion in practice

Health and Social Care Integration consultation

Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) organised a series of events to raise awareness of Health and Social Care Integration draft priorities for Glasgow. To make sure that a variety of people with disabilities attended, GDA used a number of different ways to contact people, including newsletters, individual letters, email, social media and flyers and posters distributed through local partners. As a result of this marketing effort, 137 participants attended the event, representing a wide range of ages and disabilities. The discussions from this event have gone on to shape the Health and Social Care Integration priorities for Glasgow.

Diversity and Equality Alliance, Renfrewshire – Engagement in UK City of Culture Bid

Renfrewshire Council is leading a partnership bid for Paisley to be the UK City of Culture in 2021. As part of this process, Diversity and Equality Alliance Renfrewshire brought together a range of organisations representing people with protected characteristics to take part in shaping the bid and delivering the programme. Through this work, the partnership intends that people from black and ethnic-minority groups (BME) will make a strong contribution to the bid process. It is also intended that the input of BME organisations in the run-up to the UK City of Culture events will raise awareness and understanding of the BME community and build good relations between all the communities in Renfrewshire.

Support



We will identify and overcome any barriers to participation.

How will we know we have met this Standard?

- An assessment of support needs is carried out, involving all participants.
- Action is taken to remove or reduce any practical barriers which make it difficult for people to take part in engagement activities.
- Access to impartial and independent development support is provided for groups involved in the community engagement process.

Examples of support needs

- Suitable transport
- Caring for dependants (for example, childcare or care of older people)
- Personal assistance or personal care
- Suitable and accessible venues and appropriate catering
- Access to interpreters
- Communication aids
- Meetings and events organised at appropriate times
- Access to social media, video conferencing and online resources where appropriate
- Out-of-pocket expenses



Support in practice

North Needs

– Fraserburgh Community Development Trust (FCDT)

Fraserburgh Community Development Trust carried out a community engagement exercise in the north of the town to identify the needs and ambitions of residents for services in their local area.

Fraserburgh North is an area of high deprivation with a large number of migrant workers, speaking many different languages. To recognise this, the Community Development Trust supported participants to contribute to the engagement process by filling in a questionnaire which was produced in five different languages (English, Bulgarian, Latvian, Russian and Lithuanian). Local multi-lingual research volunteers were directly involved in the survey work to help residents respond to the questionnaire.

The support provided meant there was a good response to the survey and this gave a much clearer idea of what the people in this part of Fraserburgh need, and what their ambitions are for the area.

Our Rights, Our Voices – Glasgow

Inclusion Scotland, Arthritis Care Scotland, Glasgow Disability Alliance and Contact a Family held an event to consider the Scottish Government's plan for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) called 'Our Rights, Our Voices'. The event attracted around 50 young disabled people and 20 parents and carers. To support the event, young disabled people were trained to lead group discussions.

To make sure as many people as possible could take part in the event, the partner organisations selected an accessible venue, provided taxis, personal assistance, communication support and information in various formats, planned different ways for people to take part and provided BSL interpreters and note takers.

This event proved that, with the right support, young people can be involved in and contribute to political processes which affect their lives.

Planning



There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions.

How will we know we have met this Standard?

- Partners are involved at the start of the process in identifying and defining the focus that the engagement will explore.
- A clear and agreed engagement plan is in place.
- All available information which can affect the engagement process has been shared and used to develop the community engagement plan.
- Partners agree what the outcomes of the engagement process should be, what indicators will be used to measure success, and what evidence will be gathered.
- The timescales for the engagement process are realistic.
- There are sufficient resources to support an effective engagement process.



Planning in practice

Talk Prestwick – Town Centre Charrette

South Ayrshire Council organised community engagement events in Prestwick to discuss priorities relating to local heritage, regenerating the town centre, and health and social care services. Before the events, the council set up a steering group of residents and public sector partners to work with urban design specialists. The group were clear that they wanted meaningful engagement to shape future development in the town. Their involvement in all aspects of the planning process made sure that the engagement was pitched at the right level and the voices of Prestwick residents were heard within the process of developing local plans.

Upper Eskdale Development Group – Health and Social Care

The local community development trust in the Upper Eskdale area set out to find out about the experiences and future needs of the community regarding health and social care services. With independent community development support the trust set up a planning group which included their own members and members of the wider community who had an interest in health and social care. The group decided what questions they wanted to ask the community, the methods for engagement (knocking on doors, postal surveys and public meetings), who should be involved and the timescales for the process. The results of the engagement identified a number of opportunities for improving health and social care services for the area, including both community-led and public sector responses.

Working Together



We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement.

How will we know we have met this Standard?

- The roles and responsibilities of everyone involved are clear and understood.
- Decision-making processes and procedures are agreed and followed.
- The methods of communication used during the engagement process meet the needs of all participants.
- Information that is important to the engagement process is accessible and shared in time for all participants to properly read and understand it.
- Communication between all participants is open, honest and clear.
- The community engagement process is based on trust and mutual respect.
- Participants are supported to develop their skills and confidence during the engagement.



Working Together in practice

Participatory Budgeting in Nairn

The Highland Council started this process, which is a way for local people to have a direct say in how, and where, public funds are spent. Some key features of how people worked together on the project steering group included:

- recognising and acknowledging different views and starting points;
- representing a wide cross-section of interests in the town to make sure there was a high level of engagement with the process among the wider community; and
- steering group members taking on responsibility and being listened to within the process.

This was evaluated as a positive and successful process which met its various objectives. The people who took part reported that they enjoyed it and considered it a positive experience.

Better community engagement in Moray

As part of a joint approach to improving community engagement in Moray, a variety of local groups, organisations and agencies came together to develop a shared understanding of community engagement, and to find out how to improve their engagement with excluded and disadvantaged groups.

The process involved setting up action learning groups which included community representatives and staff from a variety of local agencies. Each of these groups focused on developing community engagement activities with particular communities. From the outset, the groups agreed on outcomes, ground rules and ways of working, which helped all participants to 'buy into' the process and feel a sense of ownership. As well as the practical community engagement activities which were developed, the broader learning from the approach taken helped to form recommendations for the Community Planning Partnership's future community engagement processes.

Methods



We will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

How will we know we have met this Standard?

- The methods used are appropriate for the purpose of the engagement.
- The methods used are acceptable and accessible to participants
- A variety of methods are used throughout the engagement to make sure that a wide range of voices is heard.
- Full use is made of creative methods which encourage maximum participation and effective dialogue.
- The methods used are evaluated and adapted, if necessary, in response to feedback from participants and partners.

Some examples of community engagement methods include:

Focus groups, public meetings, mini-publics, questionnaires, participatory budgeting, community action research, online surveys, social-media campaigns, charrettes and story dialogue.



Methods in practice

Levenmouth New School Liaison Group – naming the new school

The New School Liaison Group was formed to improve community engagement between the Levenmouth community and the new school developments.

The engagement took place in two stages and used a number of engagement methods to gain views, opinions and ideas. During the first stage of the engagement, the liaison group produced a poster and flyer with a QR code which local people could scan with their smart phone to suggest a name for the new school. After the most popular names were shortlisted, a variety of voting methods (including ballot boxes and ‘bean counters’) were used in local primary and secondary schools to allow young people to get involved.

Over 80% of children and young people in Levenmouth voted, and the final choice of name was Levenmouth Academy.

Isle of Rum Community Development Trust – ‘World Café event’

As part of their work in taking forward the priorities for the island, the Isle of Rum Community Development Trust organised a community engagement event. As a key part of this event, they used the ‘World Café’ method to give all participants the best opportunity to have an equal say. As part of this event, participants were split up into four separate groups to look at the themes of housing, island development, infrastructure and involvement. Each group moved around the room and had 20 minutes to discuss each theme, highlight any problems and suggest possible solutions. Trust staff led discussion and made notes of the conversations at each table. The discussions at the event helped to inform the Community Development Trust’s development plan for the island.

Communication



We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.

How will we know we have met this Standard?

- Information on the community engagement process, and what has happened as a result, is clear and easy to access and understand.
- Information is made available in appropriate formats.
- Without breaking confidentiality, participants have access to all information that is relevant to the engagement.
- Systems are in place to make sure the views of the wider community continuously help to shape the engagement process.
- Feedback is a true representation of the range of views expressed during the engagement process.
- Feedback includes information on:
 - » the engagement process;
 - » the options which have been considered; and
 - » the decisions and actions that have been agreed, and the reasons why.



Communication in practice

Portobello Community Council – communication and feedback

Portobello Community Council were involved in engaging the community about proposed changes to the catchment area for a local school. To support the quality of the engagement process, the community council improved the maps supplied by Edinburgh City Council, making it easier for residents to assess the proposed changes to the catchment area. They also produced their own document to explain the options for residents. They distributed the maps and survey using a variety of methods including local Facebook sites, their website, their mailing list and school mailing lists. Paper copies were made available in the library. As a result of this engagement process, the ‘sibling guarantee’ was added to Edinburgh City Council’s review of the catchment area, and approved by the Council Planning Committee.

Scottish Health Council – Tayside

The Scottish Health Council in Tayside carried out an extensive engagement exercise to gain an understanding of public awareness of opportunities to provide feedback to the NHS on their services and structures. The Scottish Health Council staff engaged widely in their local communities and paid particular attention to how they provided information to, and communicated with, the people they were engaging with. After the engagement had been underway for some time, they became aware that some of the people they had spoken to were not aware of the processes for giving feedback on NHS services, or that there was support available for them to do this. As a result, Health Council staff started to provide detailed information to everyone they engaged with on who to speak to, the processes for giving feedback and the support services available locally. This helped to increase both the response rate and the quality of responses.

Impact



We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement.

How will we know we have met this Standard?

- The outcomes the engagement process intended to achieve are met.
- Decisions which are taken reflect the views of participants in the community engagement process.
- Local outcomes, or services, are improved as result of the engagement process.
- Participants have improved skills, confidence and ability to take part in community engagement in the future.
- Partners are involved in monitoring and reviewing the quality of the engagement process and what has happened as a result.
- Feedback is provided to the wider community on how the engagement process has influenced decisions and what has changed as a result.
- Learning and evaluation helps to shape future community engagement processes.



Examples of impact

Westburn Youth Group – ‘The Venchie’

During an exercise to map community assets, young people in the Westburn area of Cambuslang said that they would like to see improvements to ‘the Venchie’ – a local area of green space that had become derelict over a number of years. The group supported the young people to carry out an extensive community engagement exercise, including a door-to-door survey of local residents. At the end of the engagement process the young people applied to a local participatory budgeting fund to help them start on improvements.

The application was successful and the first upgrade to the area was completed, which included turning it into a proper grass football pitch with new grass and pitch lining. To build on this successful project, the youth group planned to carry out further consultation and engagement with the wider community on future improvements to the area.

Dunning – Placecheck

Dunning in Perthshire was involved in a Placecheck initiative. This is an engagement method for assessing the physical environment of an area, highlighting what improvements are needed, and helping all residents to work together to achieve them. In Dunning, the Community Action Group identified the improvements that were needed, prioritised them into short-term and long-term actions and agreed who should carry out each action. As a result of this process, the group were successful in gaining a variety of physical and environmental improvements, including a new community pavilion, new play equipment, new seating in the park, a new bus shelter, new pavements, and repairs to footpath and footbridges throughout the village. The initiative has allowed the community to work with service providers in the public sector and to identify and deal with its own priorities independently.

Putting the National Standards into practice

The National Standards for Community Engagement are available to download from www.voicescotland.org.uk. To help you to make the best use of the National Standards, we have developed a range of other materials and resources which are also available to download from the VOiCE website. These include the following.

Case Studies – a set of case studies which illustrate how the National Standards for Community Engagement can be used in practice.

Policy and strategy information – a set of links to relevant national policies, strategies and frameworks, with explanations of how the National Standards for Community Engagement can support and improve the way these are put into practice.

VOiCE – a free online system to help plan, monitor and evaluate community engagement practice.

Materials and resources:

- ‘Handy Hints and Key Questions’ – a useful guide to what you need to know when using the National Standards for Community Engagement;
- a fold-out summary guide to the National Standards for Community Engagement and the VOiCE tool; and
- links to a range of other materials and resources that support effective community engagement in a variety of contexts.

The National Standards for Community Engagement have been endorsed by a wide range of agencies and organisations. Please see website for details.



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