







Guide to
Achieving Community Empowerment

Contents

		Page
Introduction	Background and context	4
	How ACE works	5
	How to use the Guide	5
Section 1 Assessing		
	Part 1 – Taking Stock	11
	Part 2 – Assessing our Group	14
	Part 3 – Resources and Stakeholders	20
Section 2 Planning		
	Part 1 – Setting Outcomes - what do we want to achieve?	25
	Part 2 – Agreeing Actions - what will we do?	30
Section 3 Doing		
	Putting the Plan into practice	37
Section 4 Reviewing		
	Part 1 – Re-visiting the Group Assessment	43
	Part 2 – Reviewing our Outcomes	46
	Part 3 – Overall Review and Reflection	52

Introduction

Background and context

Strong, active communities are a vital part of a healthy nation. They provide the foundations that a successful economy can be built on, and an environment in which people can lead fulfilling and healthy lives. A community that works well is both strong and energetic. It builds and supports networks and connections that help bring people together to:

- provide care and support;
- organise celebrations;
- set up and run local projects;
- represent common interests; and
- where necessary, campaign for change.

Hundreds of community groups and organisations do all these things and more throughout Scotland, from very small informal groups to large organisations.

With all this in mind, the Achieving Community Empowerment process is intended to help community groups and organisations become more confident, better organised and more effective in achieving their aims. Throughout, we will use the term 'community group' to include all the groups, organisations, networks and other arrangements that are rooted in communities and work for the benefit of communities.

This guide has been developed as part of the Achieving Community Empowerment (ACE) programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund, and delivered by the Scottish Community Development Centre.

The ACE process guides community groups, and those who work with them, through a critical review of their roles, relationships and ambitions so that they can be as effective as possible in achieving their aims and improving their communities. It should help community groups take the appropriate steps to become more effective. As such, this guide will be helpful for community workers and others who want to encourage stronger and more active communities.



ACE

How ACE works

You can work through the ACE programme in a series of six to eight sessions lasting up to two hours. Each section can be spread over two sessions depending on how relevant it is to the community group, how much they have done already, and how many people are involved. Even if some members of the community group have worked through some sections already, they will benefit from working through it together and coming out of the programme with a joint vision and a joint plan. The guide assumes that those using it already have a basic level of experience and skills in supporting community groups.

How to use this guide

The ACE programme works through a cycle of assessing, planning, doing, and reviewing. This guide asks critical questions, and provides checklists and ways to record decisions and actions.

Each section of this guide begins with a brief description of what will be covered in it. It goes on to present some exploratory questions and gives some hints and tips on how to work through these questions with the community group. Each section has a worked example of how the responses might look, based on the experiences of community groups who have been involved in the ACE programme. The community groups are all based in the fictional community of Fairview, a housing estate in a large Scottish town.



The fictional community groups we have used are:

- **Fairview Community Futures**
(a local regeneration group concerned with improving the facilities and environment in the area);
- **Fairview Women's Health Group**
(concerned with improving opportunities for local women to improve their physical and mental health);
- **Fairview Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Group**
(providing support for the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers being housed in Fairview); and
- **Fairview Family Support Forum**
(providing support for the families of people involved in drug misuse).

Stages of the ACE process

The ACE process has the following stages.



Assessing

This stage involves taking stock of the progress the community group has made, and taking time to reflect on what they have achieved and what still needs to be accomplished. It means checking whether lessons from experience have been learnt, and setting out the things that should be looked at in more depth. This leads naturally into the assessment process, which looks at the community group's strengths, assets and areas for development, and specifically examines:

- the effectiveness of the community group's structure and operation;
- the skills, understanding and confidence of community group members and opportunities for training and development;
- how effective the community group is in reaching out to and involving their community; and
- how influential and connected the community group is in order to achieve their purposes.

This stage also explores the community group's links and connections to other existing and potential partners in order to achieve their goals.

The time taken for good-quality assessment is an excellent investment – it means there will be a clear understanding of what needs to be done, why it should be done, and what the benefits will be.



Planning

The planning stage looks at:

- the specific changes the community group wants to bring about;
- how these changes might come about;
- how their effect could be measured;
- possible courses of action;
- how to involve as many people as possible;
- how to work together and with others; and
- how to report on progress.



Doing

The doing stage focuses on the particular support that may be needed as plans are put into effect. This may involve training, advice, troubleshooting and support in organising events. The aim is to support the community group to be effective, inclusive, recognised, accountable and well managed through putting plans into practice.



Reviewing

The reviewing stage helps the community group to take an overview of progress and achievements. It involves reviewing both the extent to which desired changes have been made, and how this has been achieved. It also helps the community group to understand the reasons for any lack of progress in any area. The main aim of this stage is to learn from experience and share lessons which will guide how the community group operates in the future.

Assessing

Part 1

Taking stock

The ACE process starts by taking an honest look at what the community group is about, what they have achieved so far, their strengths and weaknesses, and why they now want to think and plan ahead.

To get started, you can encourage the community group members to draw a picture or a map of their community on a flipchart. Display, review and discuss what you can all see in the pictures, asking some of the following prompt questions. These questions will help everybody understand and agree what the community group is for, and begin to map out what needs to be done. In this way the community group can understand, agree and record where they are now, and decide which aspects need more thought and planning.



Prompt questions

The following questions should help community groups to develop a clearer picture of their own purpose and vision, as well as their community and its defining characteristics. This list is not complete, but it provides ideas that could trigger a useful discussion. Treat them as a menu to pick and choose from.

What is our community like?

- » What does our community look like?
- » How does our community 'feel'?
- » How would we describe the strengths of the community?
- » How is our community connected to the wider world?
- » What concerns us about our community?
- » What sense of identity does our community have?
- » What is there to celebrate in our community?
- » How is our community viewed by others?

What is our community group about?

Some community groups are very clear about their answers to these questions, but others may have lost a clear sense of what they are for and what they are aiming to do.

What is our vision and purpose?

This is one of the most important questions in the whole of the ACE programme and is often useful to return to at a later date. The community group may have a specific purpose (for example, taking action on an environmental problem, or supporting asylum seekers) or may have a much more general role, getting involved in a range of issues.

What issues do we work on, what kind of things have been done and what have we achieved?

The community group may have:

- » helped people in the community get access to services or support;
- » campaigned to encourage or prevent something happening in the community; or
- » brought people together through a festival or fair.

It is always good to be reminded of where and how things started and what has been achieved and learnt so far.

Who benefits as a result of our activities?

It can be useful to think about who would or could benefit from what the community group does. Obviously the more people who would benefit, the more support the community group is likely to get. Many people and

organisations can benefit from what community groups do, and there could be wider benefits for individuals as well (for example, a youth activity project can provide safety and security, and greater confidence to young people). Community groups can also benefit public services such as schools, as well as helping the neighbourhood to be a more attractive place for families to live.

What support do we get?

Many community groups can get by very well without having to ask for or depend on outside support. However, most community groups can find support very helpful in moving forward. Support can take the form of advice, training, mentoring, administrative support and financial support. It can be provided by paid workers or volunteers.

Hints and tips



Responses to the prompt questions can be gathered and presented in a variety of ways. You can use the 'mind map' like the example below to pull it all together or you may choose to record the community group's views more visually using drawings, photographs, collage and so on. The important thing is to record the information in a way that allows you to build on it through the rest of the ACE programme and use it at a later stage when monitoring and evaluating the community group's progress.

Worked Example

1

Fairview Community Futures

A local regeneration group concerned with improving the facilities and environment in the area.

Activities

- Upkeep of flower boxes
- Weekly coffee mornings
- Making bids for funding
- Family nights and community social events
- Working in partnership with other groups and agencies

Supporters

- Joint Health Improvement Team
- Lottery Funding Officer
- The council (moral and financial support)
- The CVS (legal and financial advice)
- Our support workers (direct support)
- Local community councils (provide expertise, experience and links to elected members)
- Local residents (give their time)

Group purpose and vision

Our purpose is to raise the hopes and goals of all of the local community and to develop, provide and improve services and facilities that meet an identified need. We want to achieve this by:

- developing and improving community spirit;
- helping families joining our community;
- bringing people together; and
- developing an action plan.

Who benefits?

- Local families and individuals of all ages
- Our group
- Local Health Project
- The community as a whole
- Local businesses
- Primary school
- Government
- Local government
- Other community groups

Resources

- Group members' time, skills and expertise
- Meeting space within the Community Centre and Health Flat
- Admin support through Community Learning and Development
- Funding from grants
- Income from fund-raising

Assessing

Part 2

Assessing the community group

Successful community groups – like any other organisation – succeed because they have an excellent understanding of the environment they work in, and of their strengths and weaknesses as an organisation. They make sure that they have a thorough and honest awareness of these things, and they base their plans and actions on the aspects that are most important. In this section of the guide we encourage community groups to examine what we think are the four most important factors for successful organisations.



Those factors include:

- how effective the organisation is in terms of its structure, leadership and operation;
- what skills the organisation has, and what it needs, in order to achieve its purpose;
- how effective the organisation is at involving people in what it does and how it reaches out to its wider community; and
- how effective the organisation is in influencing policies, strategies and services.

Hints and tips



We recommend you work through each part of this section separately and then bring together the responses at the end. When you are working through each part, ask participants to give their community group a score and their reasons for that score. The scoring framework used throughout ACE is as follows.

- 6 = excellent
- 5 = very good
- 4 = good
- 3 = satisfactory
- 2 = weak
- 1 = unsatisfactory

Participants can do this as a whole group or you can split them into pairs or small groups and then work out average scores – this can lead to useful discussion, particularly if there is a difference between the scores from different participants. What is most important though is the discussion that takes place, and what the community group identify as areas for improvement.

The overall scores can then be summarised to give a quick visual of the main strengths and the areas which need further development.

Group organisation

how effective and accountable we are

Strong communities need strong, effective and accountable community groups. Leadership and structure are important because every community group needs to be clear on their purpose and priorities. Also, all members need to contribute to developing the community group's purpose and priorities. All community groups need good management so that their work makes the difference needed. Larger community groups also need good systems to control spending and to make sure that legal requirements are understood and met. In the wider community, accountability can be achieved in several ways (for example, by having members elect those who will hold official positions, by holding regular consultation with the community, by providing valued and well-supported services and by being effective in benefiting the community).

Prompt questions



Direction and structure

- » How does our group work?
- » What processes are effective, and what could be done better?
- » How well informed are we about our community's needs and issues?
- » Do we encourage discussion, debate and agreement across the whole group?
- » Do we have appropriate policies and procedures in place and are these understood by everyone?

Accountability

- » How do we make ourselves accountable? (For example, do we hold public meetings and events, or produce newsletters and other information?)
- » How do we communicate our purpose and our views to the people that need to hear? (For example, through newsletters, a website or social media?)

Group skills

Change can be made when community groups have the skills, understanding and confidence they need to make things happen. These often come from experience, and from learning from successes and mistakes. It can also come from other opportunities to learn and develop skills through local training courses and so on. Skills can be developed in all the areas discussed in the ACE programme – assessment, planning, learning, influencing, mobilising, involving, managing, and many more. For community groups it can be important to think what skills the group itself has, as well as their ability to develop skills and confidence in, and understanding of, the wider community.

Prompt questions

- » What skills do we need to achieve our purposes?
- » What skills do we already have?
- » How could we get support to develop skills across our group?

Involvement and inclusion

This section is about involving and including all sections of the community. This is important because fairness and equality are, or should be, basic principles which any community group should be based on. Community groups often get started because they know or believe that there is something unfair or unjust in the way some service or development affects people without power. They understand that working in the interest of one section of the community should benefit the wider community, and vice versa. So it is important that community groups are always aware of who they are involving in what they do, and that they check they are doing everything they can to involve all groups and interests in their community.

Prompt questions

- » Do we actively try to involve all the interested parties in the community, and how do we go about this?
- » Do we actively try to bring different groups and interested parties together – to build stronger relationships between people across the community?
- » How do we deal with any conflicts or disputes between different groups or interested parties in the community?

Group influence and connections

This section focuses on how groups bring about real change in the community. This is important because it is at the core of what community groups are all about. They see an opportunity to do things that would not otherwise be done, to benefit the community. Opportunities arise when a community group has a good understanding of the needs and issues they are dealing with, a broad section of the community getting involved, and the ability to set the agenda for change and influence decisions. This section is also about how well connected the community group is.

This is important because the stronger the links and networks an organisation has, the better informed they will be, and the more influence they will have.

Prompt questions



Group influence

- » Do we have a good understanding of the needs and issues we deal with?
- » Can we influence decisions on how services are designed and delivered?
- » Are policy makers, funders and programme managers in our areas of interest aware of us?
- » Are we well known, and do we have a good reputation?
- » If we run local services or facilities, how do we do this efficiently?

Links and networks

- » How good are our links to other community groups in the area?
- » How good are our links to other organisations or networks interested in the same issues?
- » How good are our links to the local authority or other organisation responsible for the matters that our group is interested in?
- » Can we improve and extend our links and networks by visiting others or hosting events?



Worked Example

1
Fairview Community Futures

A local regeneration group concerned with improving the facilities and environment in the area.

Assessing our group

This session is designed to allow group members to assess how effective they feel the group is across a range of categories – **group organisation, skills, involvement, influence** and **connections**. These are scored on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being low and 6 being high. Reasons and evidence are provided for each score.

Group organisation

- How effective are we?
- How well-informed are we?
- Do we have open structures?
- Do we involve people in the wider community?

Average group score 3

We have achieved a lot but we're not a big group and it can be difficult to get everybody together as regularly as is necessary. Our structure can be confusing. We're still learning and need to look at how we take the next steps in developing our group. We need to be a lot better at involving more people – we need to update people more on what is happening and do this more effectively.

Skills

- What skills do we need to achieve our purpose?
- Do we have these skills or do we have access to the support needed to develop them?
- Do we have access to other skills and advice which can help us achieve our purpose?

Average group score 4

We need skills in: communicating with each other and the community; organising our work; networking; time management (individual and group); understanding employment law; managing finances; fund-raising; administration, including IT; business planning.

We have quite a few of these skills already, but some are missing and there is room to develop most of the others. We also need to develop skills in the group members rather than depending on the support workers to provide this. We have good support and we are good at finding people who can help.

Involvement and inclusion

- Do we actively try to work with all groups and sections of the community?
- Do we work to bring people together and settle any conflicts that exist?

Average group score 4

We tend to focus on families and maybe miss others. We are very open and welcoming, but we need to get more people involved. (How do we do this?) We involve the community through family days (mainly one-offs), but this tends to miss out single people and older people, and results in the same people getting involved (although last year's family day was good and involved different people).

Influence and connections

- Do we have a good understanding of the needs and issues we deal with?
- Do we involve as many people as possible?
- Can we raise awareness of the community's needs and issues?
- Can we influence decisions?
- How good are our links to other groups and agencies?

Average group score 2

We are good at actively finding out about needs and issues in our area, but are not so good at raising awareness of these needs and issues (this tends to go through peaks and troughs). We have good links with public agencies but need more involvement with other groups. We do have a good reputation with those who know us, but not enough people know about us.

Summary

The areas that the group needs to concentrate on most are:

- group organisation (particularly focusing on our structures); and
- influence and connections (particularly our links with other groups and widening our involvement with official agencies).

Assessing

Part 3

Resources and stakeholders

Who can help us achieve our purpose?

Once a community group is clear about their overall purpose and priorities they need to look at resources and sources of support. No organisation will be able to achieve all of their purposes on their own, and most of their work will be influenced by the quality of the relationships they have developed with other people and organisations. A useful way of mapping this out is through a stakeholder table (see the sample layout opposite) which looks at the motivation, capacity and opportunity of various stakeholders to help the group achieve its vision and purpose.



Hints and tips

It is often best to run this section in two stages – an initial session with the community group to look at their own, and their community's, motivation, capacity and opportunity, and to identify stakeholders or possible supporters. Once this session has been completed and recorded on the stakeholder table, a second session should be organised. As many of the identified stakeholders as possible should be invited to take part in this session, to hear about the group's plans and identify their own motivation, capacity and opportunity to help the group achieve their goals. This should then be recorded on the stakeholder table.

Sample stakeholder table

	Our group	Our community	Potential stakeholders
Motivation	What motivates and encourages our group?	Which groups in the community agree with us and support us? What can we do to encourage more support?	Why would they help us? Do we share an agenda with them?
Capacity	Do we have the ability to do what's needed?	Does the community have skills, resources, time or energy that we can tap in to?	Do potential stakeholders have skills, resources, time or energy that we can tap in to?
Opportunity	What opportunities are there for us to achieve our purpose?	What opportunity is there to involve more people?	What opportunity is there for potential stakeholders to be involved with us or help us achieve our purpose?

Planning

Part 1

Setting outcomes and indicators

What we want to achieve and how we will know we've been successful.

The starting points for this section of the programme are the:

- overall purpose of the community group (identified in part 1 of section 2); and
- results from the assessment process in section 2, which should have pinpointed the priority areas for developing the community group.



ACE

Outcomes

What we want to achieve.

These will be statements of what difference the community group want to make in connection with the identified priorities. Depending on the community group's circumstances, it may want to identify outcomes that are short-term, medium-term or long-term.



Indicators

How we will know we have been successful, and how we will show this.

Once outcomes have been defined it is useful and important to think about how they would be measured. In other words, how would the community group and the community know that change had taken place? This means establishing outcome indicators – signs to indicate any difference.



Evidence

How we will show we have achieved our outcomes.

The community group also needs to consider how they can gather the evidence they need to show that the difference has been made. This might involve doing a bit of work at the beginning to establish a baseline which any change can be measured from.



Hints and tips



A good way to go about planning is to think ahead to how people would like their community or their community group to be at some point in the future – perhaps two or three years ahead. What would it be like if nothing was done? What could it be like if something was done to tackle problems or issues?

It can be helpful to let people's ideas flow freely at first – in an ideal world, how would things be? Then it can be narrowed down to things that may be realistic, even if a little ambitious. At the end of these discussions it should be possible to establish some outcomes – in other words agreed and clearly expressed statements of how things should be in the future.

However, it is important to keep people focused on the overall purpose and the priorities identified at the assessment stage – so have these to hand, as handouts, on a flipchart or on slides.

Depending on the community group's preferred way of working, the outcomes, indicators and evidence sources can be written up in a table as shown on the next page or portrayed more visually (for example, mapping them on to wall charts or by using available computer software programmes). It is important that you use the methods that the community group is most comfortable with.



Worked Example

2

Fairview Women's Health Group

A small local community group concerned with improving opportunities for local women to improve their physical and mental health.

Outcomes, indicators and evidence

Group purpose or vision

(A concise statement that can be used to explain our purpose in the community and to the wider world)

'Isolated women in Fairview will become healthier, happier, more confident and more positive... our group makes this happen.'

	Outcomes – the changes we want to see	Indicators – how we will know this has happened	Evidence – what we need and how we will gather it
1	Group members have improved their health and well-being.	Members can cope better with life. Members have a better understanding of nutrition. Members take part in healthy activities. Members have higher self-esteem. Members are more aware of their strengths and skills and can demonstrate this. Members take part in social activities. Members develop new friendships.	Records of who takes part in activities (what and when). Feedback forms from those taking part in activities. Annual impact survey to get feedback on the benefits of taking part in activities. Feedback from members of the management group on their training activities and the skills they have developed.
2	Members have a sense of belonging in the group.	Members take part in a range of group activities. Members are involved in planning activities. Members feel supported by each other. Members have a sense of belonging. There is trust in the group and in each other. Members are aware of achievements and celebrate this. Awareness and understanding of how our group works.	Records of who takes part in activities. Quantity and quality of planning meetings. Annual impact survey. Feedback from ACE workshops and team-building sessions. Annual evaluation reports highlighting achievements.

	Outcomes	Indicators	Evidence
3	Members are more confident and aware of their strengths and skills.	<p>Members demonstrate their skills through leading group activities.</p> <p>Members have more knowledge of the different types of support available to them and know how to get it.</p> <p>Members move into employment or education.</p> <p>More members have progressed onto the management group from being a member.</p> <p>More 'friends of the group'.</p> <p>Members report that they feel more confident and can provide examples.</p> <p>Members report they depend on services less.</p> <p>More training programmes are attended by members.</p>	<p>Records of the number of members leading activities and moving into employment or education.</p> <p>Annual impact survey – reports of members depending less on various services.</p> <p>Records of training activities and programmes.</p>
4	Group members have increased their involvement in physical activities.	<p>More people are in walking groups.</p> <p>More women are involved in physical activities through the Leisure Bowl and other outdoor pursuits.</p> <p>There is high demand for corporate membership and a waiting list to become a group member.</p>	<p>Records of the number of people taking part in all activities.</p> <p>Number of monthly activities available.</p> <p>Annual impact survey – feedback on activities and effects on health</p>
5	Our group is valued and recognised by the range of agencies and groups who support isolated women.	<p>Agencies and service providers tell people about our group.</p> <p>Agencies and service providers refer people to our group.</p> <p>Agencies report that they know about our group and value its work.</p>	<p>Feedback form for agencies to give their views of our group (to be developed).</p>

Planning

Part 2



Methods and actions: what we will do and how we will do it

By this stage the community group is ready for action planning. This moves the community group from broad ideas or a vision to much more specific and detailed actions.

The main prompt questions for this stage are as follows.

- What methods will we use (for example, training, consultation, public information events)?
- Who will take particular actions, and when?
- How will the actions help us to achieve our agreed outcomes?
- How will we record the actions and what kind of evidence can we produce to show success?



Hints and tips



At this stage it is often best to return to the outcomes identified in part 1 of section 2 and have the group working on each outcome to agree how best it can be achieved. This can be done in small groups working on methods and actions relating to different outcomes, as long as there is a chance for everyone to contribute as the action plan is finalised. Once methods and actions are agreed, along with appropriate timescales, the whole group can work together to allocate tasks (either to individuals, subgroups or partners). The main aspect of this is that every action should have someone with overall responsibility for doing something about it.

Once this stage has been completed you could end up with something like the worked example on the following page. The table in the example does not link methods directly to particular outcomes as some methods contribute to achieving more than one outcome. It is up to the group how best to complete this particular part of the programme. It is important that a useful and usable recording system is established to help the group show how their actions have led to achieving their outcomes.



Worked Example

2

Fairview Women's Health Group

A small local community group concerned with improving opportunities for local women to improve their physical and mental health.

Group action plan with outcomes and with methods and activities

Outcomes	Methods and activities
Group members have improved their health and well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for group membership to the Leisure Bowl, and access to the gym.
Group members have increased their involvement in physical activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up 'Look Good Feel Good' sessions at the College. • Organise family activities and outings.
Members have a sense of belonging in the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise weekly coffee mornings.
Members are more confident and aware of their strengths and skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue administration and office activities – phone calls, emails, applying for funds. • Recruit new members, including through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » one-to-one introductory contact with potential members; and » sign-up questionnaires.
Our group is valued and recognised by the range of agencies and groups who support isolated women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make members aware of other relevant agencies and services. • Maintain website and Facebook page. • Set up three subgroups – activities, fundraising and communications. • Organise training events and sessions. • Take part in consultations, conferences and events. • Conduct annual impact survey.

Worked Example

2

Fairview Women's Health Group

A small local community group concerned with improving opportunities for local women to improve their physical and mental health.

Six-month action plan

March	Work priorities	Who
1	Funding applications to First Port and the council.	Julie and finance subgroup
2	Contact Senscot to identify other sources of funding.	Julie and finance subgroup
3	Make applications to Coalfield Regeneration Trust and Awards for All, and possibly the Women's Only Fund.	Julie and finance subgroup
4	Prepare and produce end-of-year financial report.	Julie
5	Update website.	Margaret and Kelly
6	Prepare the activity programme (monthly) and distribute.	Susan
7	Set up the activities subgroup and organise first meeting.	Susan, Kate, Sharon
8	Renew membership.	Helen
April		
1	Promote DVD.	Kelly
2	Establish weekly coffee morning.	Elspeth to lead
3	Organise the 'Spring Fling' and sell tickets (five per management group member).	Kate to lead (All)
May		
1	Set up 'Friends' group.	Kate and Kelly
2	Organise refresher training for mentors.	Susan
3	Organise next ACE workshop.	Susan (All)
June and July		
1	Sign up for at least two gala days and do a fundraising activity.	Julie
2	Deliver two family activities.	All

Worked Example

Doing

Putting the plan into practice



This section is all about putting the action plan into practice. If the group has a strong plan in place with specific methods and actions, and ways for gathering evidence to show that outcomes have been achieved, this part of the ACE process should be fairly straightforward.

The main prompt questions for this stage are as follows.

- Are we doing what we said we would do when we said we would do it?
- Are we getting the stakeholders involved and contributing appropriately?
- Are we all working together?
- Are we keeping everyone informed?
- Are any issues arising and do we need to revise any of our methods or actions as a result?

This section also gives the community group the opportunity to focus on any training or skills needs as identified at the assessment stage. However, the community group may be performing fairly substantial activity during this period, so any specific training needs must take account of the availability of group members.



Worked Example

3

Fairview Women's Health Group

A small local community group concerned with improving opportunities for local women to improve their physical and mental health.

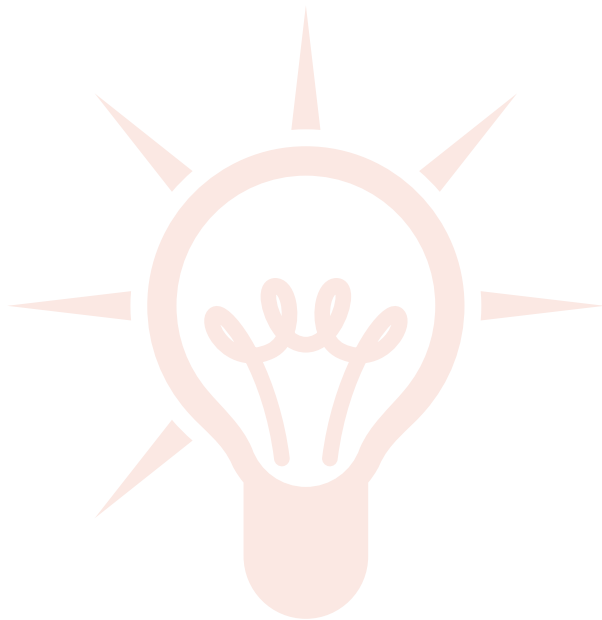
Putting the action plan into practice

March	Work priorities	Who	What happened?
1	Funding applications to First Port and the council.	Julie and finance subgroup	Funding applications sent to First Port and the council – both acknowledged, no indication of when we'll hear the decision.
2	Contact Sencot to identify other sources of funding.	Julie and finance subgroup	Not done yet – decided to concentrate on the applications we have in progress.
3	Make applications to Coalfield Regeneration Trust and Awards for All, and possibly the Women's Only Fund.	Julie and finance subgroup	Applications being prepared for CRT and Awards for All. Not sent yet – priority for the next fortnight.
4	Prepare and produce end-of-year financial report.	Julie	End-of-year financial report produced, will be presented at the next full committee meeting.
5	Update website.	Margaret and Kelly	Not done yet. Need to set aside time and get updated information from the other group members.
6	Prepare and distribute the activity programme (monthly).	Susan	Done. Next one being prepared for April (by activities subgroup).
7	Set up the activities subgroup and organise the first meeting.	Susan, Kate, Sharon	Activities subgroup set up and met on 21 st March. Subgroup will now develop the activity programme.
8	Renew membership.	Helen	All members contacted to renew their membership. Only had responses from about half the membership – need to send a further reminder in April.

Hints and tips



If the action plan allows the group to record performance against agreed actions, it should be relatively easy to monitor progress against the plan. However, it is important that this is done regularly so that any issues or lack of progress in particular areas can be tackled before they become too serious. It also gives the community group experience of regularly monitoring and updating their action plan.



Reviewing



The final stage of the ACE process involves the community group reflecting on what they have done, reviewing progress they have made to achieve the identified outcomes, and identifying what needs to be done next. There are two main aspects of this stage:

- revisiting the assessment scores and comments that were made at the assessment stage (section 1, part 2) and re-scoring against all the elements to make an assessment of progress (or otherwise) over the course of the year; and
- reviewing progress made towards the outcomes identified at the planning stage (section 2, part 1).

This review should then help the group to identify progress made over the year and their priorities for future action, and to start to plan out the next stages of their work.

Part 1

Revisiting the assessment

When revisiting the original assessment categories it is often better to do this ‘blind’ with the community group not seeing their original scores. It is only after this that the original scores should be looked at and compared against the new scores. A discussion can then take place about how the community group has developed over the course of the year in relation to each element of the assessment process. This analysis will then guide future planning of the group’s development.

Worked Example

4**Fairview Family Support Forum**

A group that provides support for the families of people involved in drug misuse.

Review

The group reviewed progress against the main priority areas identified at the beginning of the year. These were as follows.

1. Developing interaction and integration (dealing with racism)
2. Promoting volunteering and voluntary work
3. Removing barriers to people being involved
4. Having influence with service providers and decision-makers
5. Helping people to tackle their individual issues (private troubles and public issues) together
6. Improving the lives of residents and achieving changes

When reviewing progress against these areas, the group scored them as follows (with supporting comments). These are scored on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being low and 6 being high. Reasons and evidence are provided for each score.

Developing interaction and integration

(dealing with racism)

Score 4 (original score: 3)

The group scored fairly highly in this area as they felt they have developed new skills and increased confidence in interacting with their community.

Promoting volunteering and voluntary work

Score 5 (original score: 4)

The group scored themselves very highly in this area as they have seen a real increase in volunteering, not just in residents' activity but in being involved in other activities such as Eid. The housing agency also provides encouragement and support for people to do more.

Removing barriers to people being involved

Score 4 (original score: 3)

This area scored less highly as the group feel that there is still room for improvement. Particular areas to be tackled are overcoming language and cultural differences. The group are trying to overcome these barriers but it is quite difficult – there is a need to be persistent.

Having influence with service providers and decision-makers

Score 5 (original score: 4)

The group felt fairly positive about this area – the housing agency are listening more and attend meetings regularly. Services are improving as a result, but there is still room for improvement.

Helping people to tackle individual issues together

Score 5 (original score: 4.5)

The group were fairly positive about this. There is more to do and they are still trying to improve. The group members recognise that being part of their group really helps them tackle issues collectively, but the challenge is to help other people realise this as well.

Improving the lives of residents and achieving change

Score 5 (original score: 3.5)

Again this scored fairly highly. The group feel that they're making a difference and dealing with social and economic issues. They are working well with the housing agency to improve the quality of life for residents.

Reviewing

Part 2

Outcomes review session

To review performance against the identified outcomes it is important that the community group have collected the relevant evidence to demonstrate their progress. Once the community group are happy that they have all the evidence they need, they should contact all relevant stakeholders to get their views of the progress before the review session (they may even decide to invite stakeholders to be part of the review session). This is particularly important if they have involved other partners in developing the plan and in being involved in putting the plan into practice.



The review session should be timed to take place after a suitable period. This will vary from group to group, but it is important that it shouldn't just happen at the end of a piece of work. One of the main aspects of regular review is the opportunity for community groups to learn from what has happened, and use that learning to change and improve how they work, and the processes and activities they use to achieve their purposes.

The review session itself will focus on the original action plan with the outcomes clearly described and the associated indicators and evidence available for members to refer to. The community group should be asked to make an assessment of the extent to which they have met their planned outcomes, giving each outcome a score and the reasons and evidence for this.

Using a high-quality process does not always mean the best outcomes will have been achieved. It is essential to ask the direct question: 'To what extent have the outcomes identified in the plan actually been achieved?' Everyone who committed themselves to being involved will want to know the answer to this question. In relation to each outcome that was set in the action plan, the community group need to think about the following questions.

- To what degree have we met the needs we identified?
- To what degree have we achieved the outcome relating to these needs?
- Is there agreement about these answers or do different stakeholders have different views that should be recorded?



Worked Example

4

Fairview Family Support Forum

A group that provides support for the families of people involved in drug misuse.

Outcome as set out in action plan	Outcome indicators	Evidence	Score (out of 6)
<p>We have effective links with Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff and use their skills to best effect.</p> <p>(We have decided to change this outcome to 'We have effective links with Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff.')</p>	<p>We are in regular contact with Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff and carry out joint pieces of work.</p> <p>We and Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff report that their relationship is effective and valued.</p>	<p>Minutes of North Alcohol and Drugs Partnership Forum's 7th July. Staff stating that we delivered an 'amazing presentation' to Scottish Parliament on 15th June.</p> <p>Survey completed with the help of Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff.</p> <p>We are a full partner of East Fairview Alcohol and Drugs Partnership and in regular contact with their staff to perform a range of activities such as involvement in an upcoming mini-conference.</p>	3



Comments on our progress

In the early stages of being set up, we have secured funding, from Fairview Alcohol and Drugs Partnership, to perform our activities. Original members knew who the Lead workers were for each area, and in December and January we sent out formal invitations for them to be involved in our planning workshops. Three staff attended the initial planning workshop, and there has been regular contact since. Although West Fairview Alcohol and Drugs Partnership was not represented in workshops, the Lead worker expressed an interest in our work, and praised our action plan, saying that it is very comprehensive. We have been actively involved with staff in carrying out the Fairview-wide survey, and are active in formal structures. In East Fairview we are a full partner of the Alcohol and Drugs Partnership and one of our members has recently been invited to attend the East Fairview Alcohol and Drugs Partnership meeting. Our members also take up offers of training from staff through their regular bulletins and from personal contact. The next activity that staff will be invited to take part in is planning for the mini-conference on how recovering addicts can play a role in educational settings with a view to preventing young people experimenting with or dabbling in drugs. It is likely that we will continue to work with and alongside staff on common agendas and common pieces of work.



Comments on our effect

Our members scored our progress against this outcome at 3. Although contact has been fairly consistent, and joint pieces of work and offers of support are regular, this score reflects the need to continue developing working relationships with various Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff. Our members reported that they value the support and help provided by staff, but as they continue to highlight issues and concerns, some differences of opinion may arise. We want to make sure that this doesn't have a negative effect on our developing relationship with stakeholders.

Worked Example

4**Fairview Family Support Forum**

A group that provides support for the families of people involved in drug misuse.

Outcome as set out in action plan	Outcome indicator	Evidence	Score (out of 6)
We understand the existing support available to our community and can highlight gaps to relevant service providers.	<p>We can carry out research on what the gaps are for our community.</p> <p>We have information and evidence from our community on what the gaps are.</p> <p>We present evidence on gaps to the relevant service providers.</p>	<p>List of all known Family Support Groups in Fairview (ACE handbook) and contact made with each.</p> <p>A survey carried out across Fairview in June and July 2011, and a summary of results, which was sent to Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships and made available on Fairview Alcohol and Drugs Partnership e-bulletin.</p> <p>Issues arising from the research, as discussed at two ACE workshops, recorded in the CPP3 planning notes (17 October). Follow-up actions have been identified in response to the issues.</p>	4.5



Comments on our progress

Our 'community' is described as 'people affected by the drug use of someone who they care about', and initial discussions centred on what support was available to people across Fairview. We drew up a list of formal (8) and informal (2) groups, and contacted each of them to find out more about their group and whether they wanted to get involved with our work. This was a steady process throughout the year and resulted in 11 new members.

Actions agreed at the planning workshop in January included carrying out research across the 3 Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships (to be conducted by Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff) to identify what kind of support was being provided by service agencies (for example, one-to-one sessions, information on services and agencies). However, this research was not carried out. Instead, we decided to carry out a survey across Fairview to find out what support was available to people and what the barriers are to taking up family support. Alcohol and Drugs Partnership staff helped to produce and send out the questionnaire. 68 responses were captured (although not everyone answered all questions), mainly from the East Fairview area.

We summarised the responses in a report and made this available to the Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships. Our next steps will be to highlight the main issues at formal Alcohol and Drugs Partnership meetings. Barriers to taking up family support include being worried about confidentiality, loved ones not wanting them to go to a group, and transport.



Comments on our effect

Members scored this outcome at a 4 or 5, as the evidence shows that they know what family support there is and, importantly, what doesn't exist. They also know that not all people want access to the 'self-help' that Family Support Groups provide, and that other support like one-to-one professional support would also help. The survey helps us raise issues around what kind of support, and how much, is provided by public agencies and their links with the 3 Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships gives them an opportunity to tackle this in the coming year.

Reviewing

Part 3

Overall review and reflection

The review of the community group's progress against the assessment areas and agreed outcomes will lead into a more general review of the process the community group has been through. It is important that the community group takes the time to sit back and reflect on the process, what they have learned, and how that learning can be put into practice in the future. It will help the community group to think through which parts of the process were positive, and which could be applied in different ways in the future.



Some important prompt questions for this stage in the process are as follows.

- What worked well and what didn't?
- What have we learned from the process and how could this benefit our future development?
- What happened that we didn't plan for?
- What have we learned – about ourselves, about others and about our community?
- What will we do now?

Moving

The ACE programme is not a 'linear' one. In other words, it doesn't just have a beginning, middle and end. To be most useful for community groups, it should become part of a cycle of the community group continually assessing, planning, doing and reviewing with a view to learning about what works best for them, and incorporating that learning into how they develop in the future.

One of the key features of ACE has been giving community groups the opportunity to take a step back from their everyday activities so they can see that how they work has a huge bearing on their effectiveness. We hope that this guide will help community groups to continue to do that for themselves long into the future.



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