National Standards for Community Engagement (NSfCE)

Engaging with our communities to support recovery and renewal

September 2020

Introduction

This guide to the NSfCE will help you to think about how you can engage communities during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. It covers some of the issues which are impacting on communities and which might make it more difficult for people to take part in engagement activity. It also points you to useful resources and online tools that can help address these issues.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected people's health directly, but it has also had a profound impact on communities in other ways. Communities are experiencing increasing unemployment, economic recession, digital exclusion, mental illness, social isolation, homelessness and loneliness. All of these issues are disproportionately impacting on people living in our most deprived communities along with organisations and groups that support them.

It's never been more important to consider good quality community engagement and to hear from communities experiencing disadvantage about what they need to emerge from the pandemic. We need to make the most effective use of the resources we have by listening to people with lived experience of disadvantage and inequality to establish their priorities and enable them to be part of decision-making that affects their community. The NSfCE have a key role to play in Scotland's ambition to 'Build Back Better.'

As the pandemic develops, community organisations and agencies are having to change how they engage with communities and rethink how they deliver their services and support online, especially to the most vulnerable. We need to be ambitious and creative, and to involve communities from the start as we change how we do things. Good community engagement is a vital part of improving all of our health and wellbeing, tackling inequality and becoming environmentally sustainable.

Inclusion Standard

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.

For recovery and renewal

The Covid-19 pandemic requires us to think even more about how we engage with less-heard voices. Covid-19 and lockdown have had a worse impact on communities that are already marginalised and disadvantaged. It has never been more important to engage with these groups so that services and decisions work for them.

But the pandemic has also increased barriers to engagement. Some community members will be nervous about attending events or will have lost the confidence to take part in activities. The ongoing requirement for vulnerable people to self-isolate means that, for some, telephone support remains the only route to maintain contact.

Online engagement may help reach some, but the digital divide is apparent in many areas, increasing barriers to engagement among particular groups. For instance, people who are older or have learning disabilities may have additional technology support needs, while other age-groups may be technically able but don't have access to the right equipment and services.

For more information about the issues which impact on people during the pandemic click on the resources below:

● Since March 2020 the GDA team has undertaken intensive outreach with thousands of disabled people, to understand and offer support with the particular impacts and needs arising from the pandemic, shielding and lockdown.
http://gda.scot//content/publications/GDAs-Covid-Resilience-Interim-report-27April_alt-text.pdf

- Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) asked community groups and organisations about their experience of supporting communities during the pandemic. The report shows the pressures community groups are facing - as well as potential solutions. https://www.scdc.org.uk/news/article/2020/3/23/what-community-organisations-are-telling-us-about-their-covid-19-responses
- Ideas and support for digital methods of participation, as well as issues to consider around inclusion, is provided by Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations: https://scvo.org.uk/support/digital/.
- SCDC is also offering digital support to community groups during the Covid-19 pandemic: https://www.scdc.org.uk/coronavirus

Support Standard

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.

For recovery and renewal

Before using digital methods of community engagement, think carefully about what support people might need to take part. Some people may not have access to the internet or may have a poor connection which will not support video conferencing. Others may lack the skills, confidence or financial resources to take part online.

If you do decide to proceed with online engagement, you will either need to offer support to people who need it or put in place other ways for them to engage. Here are some options for how to do both:

● Some online platforms allow people to dial in by telephone. This will have implications for how you plan your session and how materials will be made available (see Methods Standard).
● Run 'test' video-conference workshops to establish if participants are able to use video-conferencing tools. It's also a way of building connections between participants.
● Assuming people are able to join your 'test' video-conference call, you can then take the opportunity to support them to take part fully and address issues people are having or barriers they are facing.
● Break up discussion events/workshops into smaller chunks.
● You could pre-record speakers for participants to watch in their own time and provide written versions. Slides can also be sent to participants in advance.
● You can combine engagement models and methods (see accompanying guidance on using the Methods Standard during Covid-19) and enable people to ask questions over email or using a forum-style platform such as Basecamp or Slack.
● Establish what the communications needs are for a community. Do you need, and have access to an interpreter for British Sign Language (BSL) or a particular language?
● Provide time for participants to have a meaningful discussion during the online session.

- Leave enough time at the end of each session to check in with how participants are before they leave. You could do a 'popcorn' round – invite them to say a word or sentence that sums up what they got out of the session/how they feel leaving the session.

Safeguarding and wellbeing

Keeping people safe and protecting their wellbeing are critical parts of good community engagement, and they create some additional considerations for using online methods. For instance:

- Consider the security and privacy implications of the video-conferencing platform or any associated tools used in the engagement process. The media has questioned the security of some platforms and you should keep a close eye on this and adjust settings and joining instructions accordingly. This is especially important when the discussion is about sensitive issues, or when people are required to tell their personal stories.
- Special consideration needs to be given to safeguarding under-18s during online engagement.
- Strong security settings are also required if you are using online voting (e.g. as part of participatory budgeting) in order to maintain the integrity and transparency of the process.
- Consider how you will protect people's contact details and full names on the chosen online system which asks participants to identify themselves prior to the discussion. It is a good idea to inform people in advance how to edit their names without including their surname.

For more information about supporting communities to engage click on the resources below:

- A guide from The Big Hack offers advantages and disadvantages of different tools including Skype, Google Hangouts, ZOOM, Teams, Facebook etc. Very useful and worth a read.
  https://bighack.org/best-videoconferencing-apps-and-software-for-accessibility/

- How we move the Climate Assembly Online: A blog on how the Climate Assembly UK moved online at the end of March 2020. Since then, they have held two assembly weekends online, with all assembly members still involved. https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/blog/project-update/how-we-moved-climate-assembly-uk-online

Planning Standard

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.

For recovery and renewal

At the start of any community engagement activity, consider bringing together a planning/steering group which involves representatives from the community. You can then jointly plan the engagement process using Visioning Outcomes for Community Engagement (VOiCE) online software www.voicescotland.org.uk to establish the purpose of the engagement, who to engage, the methods you will use, and the specific question(s) you want to discuss with the community.

At this stage you will have to consider how best you can bring the community together and how less-heard voices can be supported to be involved in the planning and decision-making processes.

Coronavirus Digital Service Delivery for Charities

Created by Third Sector Lab and SCVO Digital, this site contains a lot of useful tools, resources and videos to help you to plan your engagement process and work with communities and specific themes. Content on the link is open source - feel free to copy and paste into any toolkits, guides, etc you are delivering.

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pgVtqrjT5DvLzyE1F5oltVFdPXtAdJSPmiNcFYvQzFc/edit#

Methods Standard

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.

For recovery and renewal

As you prepare to engage the community you can plan the engagement process in VOiCE - www.voicescotland.org.uk to establish the purpose of the engagement, who to engage and the specific question(s) you want to discuss with the community. Once you have established a clear purpose and who to engage, then a decision needs to be made about the digital tools that are best for your purpose. An important choice that will have to be made is whether participants need to take part all at the same time (synchronous participation) or can take part when best suits them (asynchronous participation). Again, this will be determined to a large extent by your purpose.

There are many online tools that can be used for engagement. Some are free to use, while others have to be paid for. No tool can do everything, and what you use should match what you are trying to do. Sometimes, they'll be best used in combination with one another to perform different tasks in an engagement process.

If your purpose requires participants to deliberate intensively with one another, this will likely be best achieved by bringing them together at the same time via a videoconference (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc.) where engagement is deep and discussion can flow. On the other hand, if a less intensive form of discussion is adequate, then it may be more appropriate to use an online forum where participants can post at a time that best suits them. If participants do not need to discuss or interact at all, then other options (such as Basecamp, Survey Monkey, Google Jam Board, MIRO, MURAL, etc) may be useful.

Synchronous and asynchronous participation can be blended together as part of an engagement process, either with the same group or different groups of participants. This is likely to be the best option for an in-depth process.

For more information about available digital tools click on the links below:

- The Democratic Society has been actively working with local authorities and community organisations across Scotland since early 2016 to select, implement, test and embed digital tools for participatory budgeting (PB) processes. Click below to find out more about the tools and case studies about implementation.

  https://www.demsoc.org/participatory-budgeting-in-scotland/

- For a list of digital tools digital tools for engagement see the link below. Some of the tools are dedicated tools that have been developed for a specific engagement purpose, while others are general tools that can be purposed (or repurposed) for engagement.

  http://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/where-do-i-start-digital-engagement/different-uses-digital-tools

Working Together Standard

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.

For recovery and renewal

Working together through an engagement process requires clear working practices and guidelines so that all participants can contribute effectively and not be left out. This is particularly important when working remotely - either online or by phone. A working agreement which clearly outlines how you should operate can be helpful.

Operating remotely can be a challenge for collective working processes so it is important that enough time is spent at the start in ensuring that all participants are comfortable with how you are going to proceed. As you proceed through the engagement process there are some important things to remember.

Everyone should be able to participate equally - this may mean support being provided to some participants to be able to use whatever platform(s) are being used. This may include providing equipment, covering any extra expense that is involved in using the equipment, and providing training and guidance in using the equipment and the platforms that are chosen.

On-going support is crucial - it should not be assumed that an initial training session is enough for everyone involved to participate equally. Taking time to check-in and check-out of sessions is important and informal support or buddying between sessions can help to reassure people and develop their confidence to participate in the process.

Communication Standard

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.

For recovery and renewal

Communication methods and approaches are a key part of any community engagement process. It is important to be clear about the purpose of the communication and the intended audience. Internal communication amongst partners and participants needs to be agreed and then applied consistently.

Digital methods of communication have become more important during the Covid-19 pandemic. Measures put in place to protect people, such as social distancing, mean that face-to-face methods like events are currently more difficult. But there are opportunities as well as challenges. Digital communication about the engagement process can take different shapes and forms and most community engagement activities will already include an element of electronic communication such as Facebook pages, Twitter, websites and forums.

It is vitally important to ensure that a greater focus on digital approaches does not exclude certain groups or sections of the community. Here, it will help to speak to as many local community groups and projects as possible about people's needs, particularly those representing people who may face barriers to technology, including disabled people, older people and people experiencing poverty and socio-economic disadvantage.

Community groups and other local projects are likely to have a knowledge of how people prefer to be communicated with as well as a reach into or contact with more excluded groups (e.g. people who are housebound, have language barriers, or who face additional barriers such as hearing or visual impairment). A good communications plan for your engagement will focus on how to reach these groups.

A key part of community engagement is about seeking feedback from the wider community. Methods for doing this digitally or remotely include Facebook groups, Twitter, Online forums, and email. As with other elements of communication, care should be taken to develop a mix of methods that are appropriate for the target group and to ensure that people who face additional barriers are enabled to give their views and feedback throughout the process. This may be more time intensive for those who are carrying out the engagement but will ensure that less-heard voices are listened to in the community engagement process.

Impact Standard

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.

For recovery and renewal

As with any engagement processes there is a need to monitor, review and evaluate how the engagement was carried out and the impact this has had. A useful way of doing this is to use VOiCE (Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement). This is an online tool for planning, monitoring and evaluating engagement.

When using VOiCE, partner organisations and community members take part in a review of the community engagement. Physical distancing requirements make it harder to use face-to-face activities as part of this review and online methods are one way of overcoming this challenge. Participants can give feedback through online surveys and interviews and/or participating in online review sessions using videoconferencing.

The outputs from this review process can then be recorded on VOiCE and shared with all participants through various means such as e-bulletins and community websites or online noticeboards. Again, care should be taken to undertake review activities in a way that will allow people with different needs to participate and access the information and findings that are produced.

Further information

- Access VOiCE and the National Standards for Community Engagement at http://www.voicescotland.org.uk/.