

BETTER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Development of a learning programme to support and improve practice in engaging with communities

June 2009

Following the launch of the Community Empowerment Action Plan in March, the Scottish Government has provided National level investment in a programme to develop learning materials for people who are charged with working with communities, to ensure that they have the right skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles. The programme is based on the Better Community Engagement Framework (Learning Connections, Communities Scotland, 2007) which sets out a framework of competences designed to enable the planning of learning in community engagement and was developed to build the capacity of practitioners in community engagement. The framework complements the National Standards for Community Engagement (Communities Scotland, 2005) and The Learning in Regeneration Skills Pack, (Scottish Centre for Regeneration, Communities Scotland, 2005).

The aims of this programme are to;

- establish one or more working models of effective learning for community engagement across Scotland
- evidence how structured learning could impact or improve community engagement practice
- provide an evidence base for future development of learning for community engagement

Linked Work and Training Trust (LWTT)

LWTT have been contracted to deliver this programme on behalf of the Scottish Government. LWTT has been delivering training and consultancy in Scotland since 1995 and has an established reputation for quality and innovation in training, consultancy and research services across a range of policy areas relevant to community learning development, regeneration and social inclusion. It is an award winning social economy organisation and has been operating for 14 years. LWTT will subcontract the Scottish Community Development Centre to undertake some of the work of the programme.

The Programme

The programme is based on developing, implementing and evaluating models and approaches for effectively improving competencies and skills in community engagement. The model for delivery of this project is a national development programme which will operate through 10 local demonstration projects. At the core of the programme is:

- development of training programmes and materials
- working with local stakeholder organisations to plan, develop and oversee the local demonstration projects
- supporting the delivery of learning, working with local learning providers
- establishing a range of delivery models across the local demonstration projects
- evaluating the progress and impact of all aspects of the project

- disseminating learning and conclusions by a range of appropriate methods to stakeholders across Scotland in order to inform and stimulate learning, leading to improved practice in community engagement

Engagement, shared ownership and partnership working with stakeholders at both local and national levels, will be crucial to the success of this project. At a local level, this will involve working with the local demonstration projects and local stakeholders, such as the local Community Planning Partnership. At a national level, it involves engagement with umbrella organisations, such as, CoSLA, voluntary sector intermediaries, the Community Development Alliance Scotland (CDAS) and Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland, (CLDMS) and others.

The Local Demonstration Projects

The response to the request for participating local demonstration projects was very encouraging with 19 expressing a strong interest. Ten projects were selected to reflect a mix of urban and rural areas, whole partnership approaches and smaller scale, more local work and the foundation elements which make up the framework for learning set out in 'Better Community Engagement – A framework for learning'. The successful projects are (Project; need being addressed);

Angus Council, Community Learning and Development Service: Reinforce the specific purpose of community engagement involving communities in the planning and delivery of services. Increase confidence and competence in the conduct of community engagement activities. Build capacity in communities. Strengthen voluntary sector participation in community engagement processes and structures.

Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar: Build the confidence of all members of the community. Raise their awareness of the various Partnership Structures and engagement routes. Raise awareness of Community Planning and the Single Outcome Agreement. Raise awareness of effective community engagement

East Renfrewshire Council: Wider awareness of the rationale for and benefits of community engagement, the policy framework the impact community engagement has upon project timescales and project delivery, the challenges posed and skills required when undertaking successful community engagement and the establishment of agreed Council standards for community engagement projects.

The Edinburgh Partnership: Improve the co-ordination of engagement activities across the city. Identify a suitable e-engagement solution that will meet the consultation needs of community planning partners and develop a modern purpose designed service. Develop a physical/ virtual network or 'community of practice'.

Falkirk Council: Develop a specific, tailored package of training for elected members to develop their role in community engagement; for managers to fully understand the distinctions between consultation and more participative approaches to engagement and to act as leaders of community engagement activities, for frontline staff undertaking community engagement work. Enhance the ability to use new technologies for community engagement. Develop training materials for staff that can enable all of our services to engage with an ageing population and the challenges of European labour mobility creating a more linguistically and ethnically diverse society.

Faith in the Community (Scotland): Ensure that the community skills training and resources become more fully accessible across the wider faith sector. Overcome cultural, religious and language barriers which undermine the commitment to equalities. Work closely with public sector agencies to help to increase religious literacy. Increased training and awareness of key community engagement tools and methodologies.

Fife Council, Performance and Organisational Support: In the implementing the National Standards for Community Engagement a network of champions was established. Examine the various ways that the role of 'champion for community engagement' has developed across the area and bring that experience to all. Enable 'champions' to reflect and act on personal learning.

Moray Council: Developing Neighbourhood Charters and Neighbourhood Agreements between communities and Community Planning Partnership agencies. Targeting and involve local residents who may have disabilities that act as a barrier for getting involved in their communities. Targeting and involving settled residents who may not have English as their first language

Voluntary Action in Badenoch & Strathspey (VABS): Understand better the regulations, powers, roles and specific remits of community learning and development partners. Train in methodologies other than Appreciative Inquiry and in PR skills for intermediaries working with agencies and communities. Develop communications strategies. Deal with apathy and effectively engage community activists.

West Lothian Council Communities Team: Develop the capacity of the local community to meaningfully influence and engage in locality planning. Train both community and workers in a more structured way exploring new approaches to community engagement and capacity building. Create a cohesive strategy endorsed by all partners including the community. Improve and develop robust and clear monitoring and evaluation systems to capture the effectiveness of the engagement process.

Over the summer each demonstration project will be preparing an action plan based on learning needs, setting out local aims and objectives, training resources, identifying targets and scheduling activities. A more detailed training needs and resource analysis is an important part of this process.

Further Information

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