## Acknowledgements

David Wilcox
Flat 1
43 Bartholomew Close
London EC1A 7HN
david@partnerships.org.uk

# Contents

# Foreword

Over the past ten years there has been a growing tendency to attempt to get the community either individually or collectively to become involved in the delivery of services at a local level. The citizens charter, community care, the Housing Acts and City Challenge all offer the community an opportunity to play a role as either partners, providers or consumers. However, it is seductively easy to rush into participation that can be fraught with dangers.

Before getting involved both the service providers and the community would do well to pause for thought. What level of participation do we want? What are the pitfalls? What is the best way of going about it? These are all questions that the community and the service providers (statutory as well as voluntary) should seek to answer before embarking on a participatory journey.

Too often in the past the road to participation has been paved with good intentions only to lead up time consuming and wasteful dead-ends which result in disillusionment and resentment for all concerned.

Participation, like democracy, has meant many things to many people. The opportunities for participation are there to be grasped but only if all those involved have a common understanding and share a common language.

This guide provides both a theoretical framework for common understanding and a dictionary to facilitate the dialogue that can lead to successful participation. The guide also provides practical advice on tools and techniques that can be used to identify blocks and find solutions.

Reflecting on my own experience of working as a local authority community worker, a consultant and now in a new university I can readily see how the guide could be useful in a variety of ways and settings.

For instance, in teaching the guide could provide a starting point to examine the whole concept of participation and the potential pitfalls. In a consultancy/training role the guide could be used to assist the client establish where they are on the 'map' of participation and also where they consider the other players to be. This analysis should provide the basis for more reasoned actions.

For the local authority officer the guide provides a comprehensive description of the implications of participation at whatever level. This can be immensely useful when convincing sceptical managers and councillors that consultation is more than just talking to people.

One of the most common arguments against community participation is that it is costly and time consuming. However, no-one has yet attempted to calculate the costs in terms of time and lost good will of getting it wrong.

TQM (Total Quality Management) is based on the simple notion that it is more cost effective to get it right first time than correct mistakes later. This guide provides some guidelines for TQM in participation.

The toolkit part of the pack provides a range of techniques and tools from which organisations and individuals can select. The tools assist in identifying blockages and suggest ways forward.

Careful selection and application of the most appropriate tool is an essential part of any job, but organisations using a tool for the first time may need to seek advice. The guide provides some signposts to further information about the tools and their use.

The relationship between providers and customers in the public social services is becoming an increasingly important one. Government is pressing the case for participation and partnership in urban regeneration. This book provides a guide to understanding and developing that relationship.

*Brian Batson*
*Management in the Voluntary Sector Unit*
*Leeds Metropolitan University*

# Introduction

**T**his guide is intended for the growing number of people who say 'I believe in the idea of community participation – but how do you do it?' Practitioners who are asking, for example:

■ How do you run a public meeting which doesn't turn into a slanging match?

■ When do you use surveys, and when do you get residents on a housing estate involved in building a model of the future they would like?

■ How do you deal with councillors who talk about participation, but are anxious not to lose control or status?

■ What is the difference between consultation, participation, partnership and empowerment?

The idea of the guide came from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, who promote and fund a wide range of research and development projects that pose these types of problems.

The original aim was to provide a quick overview of participation and then signpost readers to techniques.

However, it rapidly became clear that while there is plenty of theory about participation, there aren't many cookbooks easily available. In order to write the guide it was necessary to build a theoretical framework – a signposting system – and then summarise key topics and techniques in an A-Z of effective participation.

## A health warning

Although this guide draws on a wide range of expertise, and drafts have been read by experienced practitioners, it hasn't been tested as a whole in the field. All the techniques are drawn from practice, but some come from Operational Research, some from community development, some from commercial consultancy and training. It is a mixed menu. I hope readers will let me know what work well, and what need improvement, so that I can develop an improved later edition. See the inside front cover for details on how to comment.

## The quotations

I have sprinkled quotations through the guide to show that few ideas are new, and they have often been expressed rather better elsewhere. I am conscious that most are from dead white men, who are strongly represented in the handy directories from which they were drawn. I hope readers can offer some more contemporary gems.

## Who are you?

The guide is aimed mainly at people who have the task of starting and managing participation processes, or who control funds and other resources.

## Who am I?

I started my working life as a journalist, mainly writing about planning, housing, transport and development in London. For the past 15 years I have specialised in consultancy and training for groups setting up partnership organisations like development trusts. The guide reflects this background and approach rather than, for example, social or health care.

## Use of material

The guide is intended to be a resource which groups and organisations can develop for their own purposes, and you are free to copy and use material in the guide for internal training. I would be interested in any examples of this use, together with comments and additions for a second edition.

If you would like to use the material more extensively, please contact me at the address on the inside cover. I can also supply the contents of the guide on computer disk.

# A guided tour

The front of the guide is a mixture of theory and practice which signposts readers to topics and methods for participation in the A-Z at the back. It doesn't read like a step-by-step manual or cookbook for several reasons:

■ Every situation is different, and while there are some common guidelines and pitfalls, you have to work out your own menu and which recipes are appropriate.

■ Effective and successful participation is about style and approach as much as particular recipes.

■ Different methods suit different people.

## Theory

The main theoretical ideas are summarised under *10 key issues of participation*. For example:

■ I have adapted Sherry Arnstein's idea of a ladder of participation in which the rungs are different levels of participation that authority allows to citizens. Are people being manipulated, or offered some control over their lives?

■ Perhaps the most important issues then are who's who – and who decides. Who controls the money, the design of projects, how services are run? What are the different interests in the community? And who decides their levels on the ladder? These are the stakeholders.

■ This guide is written mainly for people – here termed practitioners – who have to make those decisions and work with the different interests.

■ This participation process takes place over time, and four main phases are identified: initiation, preparation, participation, continuation.

■ Different interests may seek different levels of participation, and be involved at different phases of participation.

■ The commitment – or apathy – of different interests will depend mainly on the ownership they have of any ideas, and the involvement they are offered in putting ideas into practice.

This theory is developed in more detail in later sections:

*A Framework for participation* brings together the ideas about levels, phases and stakeholders.

*Where do you stand?* develops each of the levels in more detail, with guidelines on when each may be most appropriate, and the methods you might use.

*It takes time* explores the phases of the process from initiation through to continuation, and places strong emphasis on the need for preparation before you start participation proper.

*Signposts from theory to practice* identifies some common issues and questions which keep cropping up in participation processes, and uses them to provide some signposts to topics and techniques in the *A-Z section. Signposts* is the most complex of the sections, and is included so that you see the ideas which underlie the other sections.

## Practice

The first practical section – *Easy Answers* – comes directly after the *Key Issues* to provide some light relief and a flavour of the difficulties that off-the-shelf recipes can produce. Later there are two sections which offer practical suggestions:

*Guidelines on how to...* provides some overall guidelines for participation, then deals with the main tasks in the participation process from the point of view of someone planning and managing the process.

## The A-Z

The *A-Z section* is a mix of topics and methods which aims to provide a pool of ideas and practical advice to supply more detail for the theory and practice sections.

## Using the guide

The guide is not designed to be read through from front to back – you should be able to dip in to it and find cross-references to other sections which will lead you to areas of interest. There is deliberately quite a lot of repetition to allow for this. However, I suggest:

■ Read the sections on *10 Key Issues* and the *Framework* before tackling any of the practical detailed sections.

■ Use *Easy Answers* as a way to find some pointers to key practical issues in the A-Z.

■ Only try and use the *Guidelines on how to ...* section when you feel familiar with most of the rest of the guide.
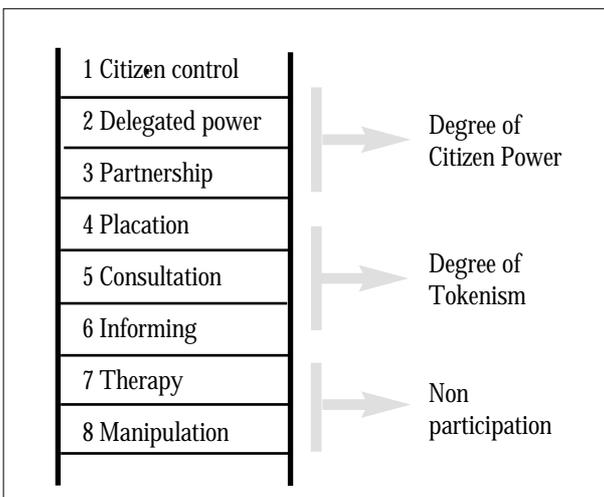
# 10 key issues of participation

**B**ehind the detailed suggestions in the guide about how to manage participation effectively are 10 key issues. Each of these is also dealt with in the A-Z and in other sections.

## Level of participation

Sherry Arnstein, writing in 1969 about citizen involvement in planning in the United States, described an eight-step ladder of participation. I have altered this to five stances:

■ Information

■ Consultation

■ Deciding together

■ Acting together

■ Supporting independent community interests

I do not suggest any one stance is better than any other – it is rather a matter of 'horses for courses'. Different levels are appropriate at different times to meet the expectations of different interests. Here's the original Arnstein model.

| 1 Citizen control | |
| --- | --- |
| 2 Delegated power | Degree of |
| 3 Partnership | Citizen Power |
| 4 Placation | |
| 5 Consultation | Degree of |
| 6 Informing | Tokenism |
| 7 Therapy | Non |
| 8 Manipulation | participation |

**1** Manipulation and **2** Therapy. Both are non participative. The aim is to cure or educate the participants. The proposed plan is best and the job of participation is to achieve public support by public relations.

**3** Informing. A most important first step to legitimate participation. But too frequently the emphasis is on a one way flow of information. No channel for feedback.

**4** Consultation. Again a legitimate step – attitude surveys, neighbourhood meetings and public enquiries. But Arnstein still feels this is just a window dressing ritual.

**5** Placation. For example, co-option of hand-picked 'worthies' onto committees. It allows citizens to advise or plan ad infinitum but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice.

**6** Partnership. Power is in fact redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders. Planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared e.g. through joint committees.

**7** Delegated power. Citizens holding a clear majority of seats on committees with delegated powers to make decisions. Public now has the power to assure accountability of the programme to them.

**8** Citizen Control. Have-nots handle the entire job of planning, policy making and managing a programme e.g. neighbourhood corporation with no intermediaries between it and the source of funds.

## Initiation and process

This guide deals with situations where someone, or some organisation, seeks to involve others at some level – that is, participation doesn't just happen, it is initiated. Someone (termed here a practitioner) then manages a process over time, and allows others involved more or less control over what happens. In the guide the process is described during four phases: Initiation – Preparation – Participation – Continuation.

## Control

The initiator is in a strong position to decide how much or how little control to allow to others – for example, just information, or a major say in what is to happen. This decision is equivalent to taking a stand on the ladder – or adopted a stance about the level of participation.

## Power and purpose

Understanding participation involves understanding power: the ability of the different interests to achieve what they want. Power will depend on who has information and money. It will also depend on people's confidence and skills. Many organisations are unwilling to allow people to participate because they fear loss of control: they believe there is only so much power to go around, and giving some to others means losing your own.

However, there are many situations when by working together everyone can achieve more than on their own. This is one benefit of participation. The items on *Power* and *Empowerment* cover the difference between Power to... and Power over.... People are empowered when they have the power to achieve what they want – their purpose.

## Role of the practitioner

This guide is written mainly for people who are planning or managing participation processes – here termed

'practitioners'. Because these practitioners control much of what happens it is important they constantly think about the part they are playing.

# Stakeholders and community

I think that 'stakeholders' is one piece of jargon which really helps our understanding of participation. On the other hand 'community' can be a hindrance.

A stakeholder is anyone who has a stake in what happens. The term forces us to think about who will be affected by any project, who controls the information, skills and money needed, who may help and who may hinder. It does not follow that everyone affected has an equal say; the idea of the ladder is to prompt thinking about who has most influence.

Community is a problem term if it is used as a blanket description for 'all those other people'. There are many communities, defined by, for example, people's shared interests, locality, age or gender. The 'community' which participates will depend on the project or programme because different people are interested in different issues. Where community is used in the guide it is shorthand for communities.

# Partnership

Partnership, like community, is a much abused term. I think it is useful when a number of different interests willingly come together formally or informally to achieve some common purpose. The partners don't have to be equal in skills, funds or even confidence, but they do have to trust each other and share some commitment. In participation processes – as in our personal and social lives – building trust and commitment takes time.

# Commitment

Commitment is the other side of apathy: people are committed when they want to achieve something, apathetic when they don't. But what leads to commitment? Not, in my experience, telling people 'you ought to care', inviting them to public meetings or bombarding them with glossy leaflets. I think people care about what they are interested in, and become committed when they feel they can achieve something. Hard selling won't achieve that. If people are apathetic about your proposals, it may simply be that they don't share your interests or concerns.

# Ownership of ideas

People are most likely to be committed to carry something through if they have a stake in the idea. One of the biggest barriers to action is 'not invented here'. The antidote is to allow people to say 'we thought of that'. In practice that means running brainstorming workshops, helping people think through the practicality of ideas, and negotiating with others a result which is acceptable to as many people as possible.

Clearly this isn't possible if you are simply providing people with information about your own ideas, or consulting them on a limited number of ideas of your own. Apathy is directly  proportional to the stake people have in ideas and outcomes.

# Confidence and capacity

Ideas and wish lists are little use if they cannot be put into practice. The ability to do that depends as much on people's confidence and skills as it does on money. Many participation processes involve breaking new ground – tackling difficult projects and setting up new forms of organisations.

It is unrealistic to expect individuals or small groups suddenly to develop the capability to make complex decisions and become involved in major projects. They need training – or better still the opportunity to learn formally and informally, to develop confidence, and trust in each other.

# The next sections

Each or the terms above is dealt with in more detail in the *A-Z section*, and you may wish to skip the following sections and browse the A-Z, then return to some of the theory.

The first theoretical section, *A Framework for Participation,* takes the revised ladder of participation, and extends it across time – the process – and across interests – the stakeholders.

Before that here are some apparently easy answers to participation problems.

# Easy answers

Faced with ideas like levels of participation, different phases and roles you may be tempted by some quick fixes for your participation problems. These can bring their own difficulties.

## 'What we need is a public meeting'

You will certainly need to meet the public, but the conventional set-up with a fixed agenda, platform and rows of chairs is a stage set for conflict. Among the problems are:

■ The audience will contain many different interests, with different levels of understanding and sympathy. It is difficult to know how to pitch a presentation.

■ It is very difficult to keep to a fixed agenda – people may bring up any issue they chose and you just look authoritarian if you try and shut them up.

■ Few people get a chance to have a say.

*As an alternative:*

■ Identify and meet key interests informally.

■ Run workshop sessions for different interest groups.

■ Bring people together after the workshop sessions in a report-back seminar. By then everyone should have some ideas in common.

■ If you must do a one-off meeting, split people into small groups early on and run a report back in the second half.

■ Make clear in all publicity that it is an ideas session with group discussion.

■ Plan the layout of the room(s) so you avoid 'them and us', and can split easily into groups.

■ In short, makes a public meeting the last thing you do, not the first.

*See Access, Public meetings, Workshops.*

## 'A good leaflet, video and exhibition will get the message across'

These may well be useful tools, but it is easy to be beguiled by the products and forget what you are trying to achieve.

*Before you brief the production team first consider:*

■ What level of participation are you aiming for? If it is anything more than information-giving, you are looking for feedback and possibly other people's ideas and commitment. High-cost presentations suggest you have made up your mind.

■ What response do you want – and can you handle it?

■ Could you achieve more with lower-cost materials and more face-to-face contact?

*See Communications, Where do you stand?, Videos*

## 'Commission a survey'

A questionnaire study and/or in-depth discussion groups can be an excellent ways to start a participation process. On the other hand they can be a magnificent way of avoiding the issue of what you want by asking other people what they want. Fine, if you are then able to deliver.

*Bear in mind:*

■ Surveys require expert design and piloting to be useful.

■ They are only as good as the brief you provide. Why do you want a survey?

■ It is unwise to jump from an analysis of the results straight to proposed solutions, particularly if you want the commitment of other interests. The analysis will inevitably be an abstraction, and the ideas will not be 'owned' by anyone unless people have a chance to think them through.

■ In planning a survey: first put yourself on the receiving end of the questioning, and second design it as part of a process which will lead through to some action.

*See Surveys.*

## 'Appoint a liaison officer'

That may be a useful step, but not if everyone else thinks it is the end of their involvement in the process. Are you just trying to pass the buck to someone else ?

*Aim to empower your liaison officer. Consider:*

■ Do they have the necessary skills and resources for the job?

■ Will they get the backing of other colleagues?

■ Are they being expected to occupy conflicting roles – that is, wear too many hats? It is difficult to present yourself as a neutral facilitator if you are also making recommendations on funding. The temptation to manipulate agendas is strong.

*See It takes time.*

## 'Work through the voluntary sector'

Voluntary bodies are a major route to communities of interest, and may have people and resources to contribute to the participation process. However, they are not 'the community'.

■ There will be many small community groups who are not part of the more formalised voluntary sector.

■ Voluntary groups, like any organisations, will have their own agendas – funding targets to achieve, issues to pursue. They are not a neutral.

*Treat voluntary organisations as another sectoral interest in the community – albeit a particularly important one:*

■ Check out organisations with a number of different sources. Having said all that, voluntary organisations will have a

wealth of experience and are essential allies. They've been through many of the problems of involving people before.

*See Community, Stakeholders, Voluntary sector.*

## 'Set up a consultative committee'

Some focus for decision-making will be necessary in anything beyond simple consultation processes. However:

■ Even if a committee is elected or drawn from key interest groups it will not be a channel for reaching most people.

■ People invited to join a committee may feel uncomfortable about being seen as representatives.

■ The committee can just reinforce 'them and us' attitudes if some members have more power than others.

*Consider instead:*

■ A group which helps you plan the participation process.

■ Surveys, workshops and informal meetings to identify other people who might become actively involved.

■ A range of groups working on specific issues.

■ Defining any central group in terms of the longer term aim. For example, if a Management Board or Trust is a possibility, you are looking for a 'shadow' Board.

*See Committees, Workshops.*

## 'There's no time to do proper consultation'

That may be the case if the timetable is imposed externally – or do you feel that consultation will raise questions you can't answer? Beware: the questions won't go away, and you could be forced into a climb-down later on in the face of protest.

*If the timetable is genuinely tight:*

■ Explain the pressure that you are under.

■ At least produce a leaflet or send out a letter.

■ Run a crash programme for those interested – perhaps over a weekend.

*See It takes time, Timeline.*

## 'Run a Planning for Real session'

Special 'packaged' techniques can be very powerful ways of getting people involved. However there are horses for courses – no one technique is applicable to all situations. Are you just falling into the technology trap – believing that a gadget will fix the problem? This guide aims to suggest what is appropriate when.

*See Planning for Real.*

## 'It's technical – requiring a professional solution'

If you believe that, why consult anyone? Before following this arrogant course, reflect on the many examples of disaster and political miscalculation where the experts knew best.

*Before leaving it to the experts consider:*

■ Are you sure you know what the problem is – would everyone else agree?

■ Is there really only one way of fixing things?

■ Do you need the support of other interests to carry the proposals through? If you don't give them an early say in the solution they could become part of the problem.

*See Problem clarification, Decision-making.*

## 'Bring in consultants expert in community participation'

There's some truth in the saying that 'consultants are people who steal your watch in order to tell you the time'. Often you have the answer yourself, and you are just trying to avoid grappling with the issue. Of course there are situations when you need outside expertise – whether technical, or in clearing your own mind or facilitating the participation process.

*If you do use consultants:*

■ Get a recommendation from a previous client if possible.

■ Give a clear brief on what you are trying to achieve, the level of control and boundaries for action. At the same time be prepared to discuss and, if necessary, renegotiate the brief.
■ Encourage them to ask hard questions and provide an independent perspective.

■ Play an active role in their work to provide continuing guidance and learn from the experience. Don't use the consultants as insulation.

■ Make sure you and your organisation can deliver in response to the ideas they produce, and you can handle things when they leave.

■ Include work within your organisation to parallel that with community interests. Many problem in participation processes arise within the promoting organisation.

■ Agree a realistic budget – then challenge the consultants to perform.

■ Remember that most consultancy exercises are only as good as the client.

*See Consultants.*

# A framework for participation

**T**his section introduces a theoretical model for thinking about participation which brings together ideas from the *10 Key Issues* section, and which provides a framework for the rest of sections.

■ There are different levels of participation appropriate for different situations.

■ There isn't one 'community' but many interests – or stakeholders – to consider.

■ Participation takes time.

■ You must be clear about the part you play in the process – your role .

■ All these issues influence which methods you should use.

## Three dimensions of the framework

The framework is developed from the idea of a ladder of participation discussed in the *10 Key Issues* section. The framework adds two other dimensions to the idea of the level of participation on a ladder:

■ The phase or stage of participation.

■ Different interests – or stakeholders – may be at different levels or stages of participation.
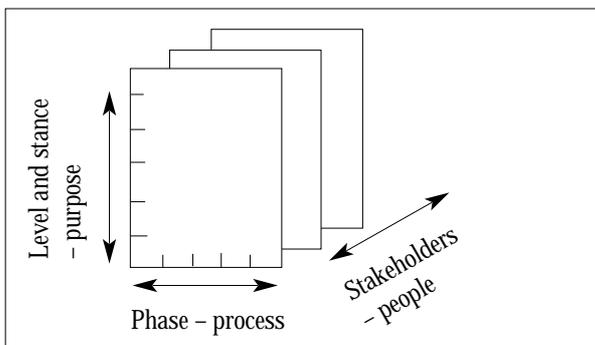


See the set of questions at the end of this section about who 'you' are and what you are trying to achieve.

## 1 Level of participation – where do you stand?

*To lead the people, walk behind them.*
Lao-Tzu.

The ladder of participation model described in the previous section suggests some levels are better than others. In this framework I suggest it is more of a case of horses for courses – different levels are appropriate in different circumstances.

The key issue is what 'stance' are you taking as someone managing a participation process, or controlling resources,

and your reasons for doing so.

I suggest thinking of five levels – or stances – which offer increasing degrees of control to the others involved.

■ **Information.** The least you can do is tell people what is planned.
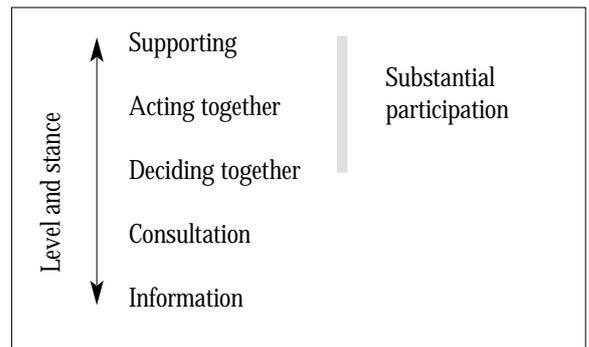


*Compare this diagram with Sherry Arnstein's ladder in 10 Key Issues*

■ **Consultation.** You offer a number of options and listen to the feedback you get.

■ **Deciding together.** You encourage others to provide some additional ideas and options, and join in deciding the best way forward.

■ **Acting together.** Not only do different interests decide together what is best, but they form a partnership to carry it out.

■ **Supporting independent community initiatives.** You help others do what they want – perhaps within a framework of grants, advice and support provided by the resource holder.

The 'lower' level of participation keep control with the initiator – but they lead to less commitment from others. Each of these levels is discussed in more detail in the next main section: *Where do you stand?*

## 2 The phase – where have you got to?

*It is a long way from conception to completion.*
Moliere.

Participation is a process in which people have to think through what they want, consider some options, and work through what should happen. I suggest there are four main phases:

■ **Initiation.** The phase at which something triggers the need to involve people, and you start to think what that involves.

■ **Preparation.** The period when you think through the process, make the first contacts, and agree an approach.

■ **Participation.** The phase in which you use participation methods with the main interests in the community.

■ **Continuation.** What happens in this phase will depend very much on the level of participation – you may be reporting back on consultation, or at another level setting up partnership organisations.

Initiation    Preparation    Participation    Continuation
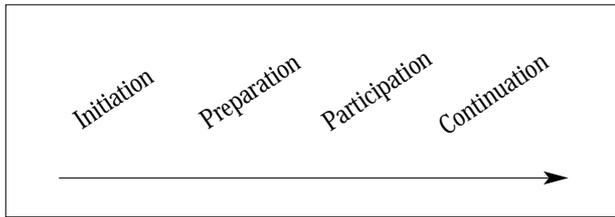
These different phases are discussed in more detail in the section *It takes time.*

# 3  People – who is involved?

*All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.*
George Orwell.

Some people will want – or demand – more involvement than others. Others will wish not to be involved. Identifying these different interests – stakeholders – and negotiating the level of participation appropriate is the third dimension of the framework.

Politicians
Officers
Activists
Residents
Business
Local groups
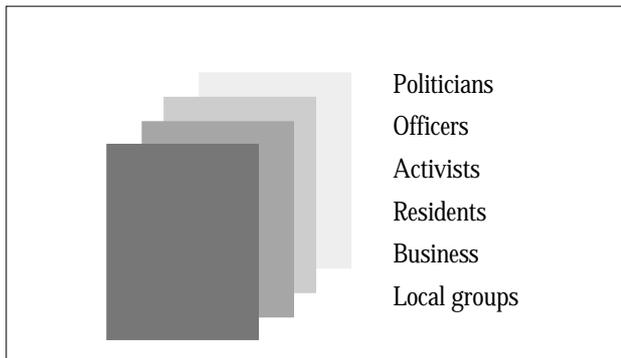
Some of the main issues in participation are about where power and control lies between these interests, and the role of 'you' in this.

Before starting a participation process it is important to reflect on the role you have – the hat you are wearing. The way you act may be influenced by how far you control resources, to whom you are answerable. People's attitudes to you will certainly be influenced by the role and power they think you have.

It is also essential to clarify the purpose of participation – because that will determine which stakeholders benefit. These issues are discussed in the items on *Beneficiaries, Power* and *Empowerment.*

# Effective participation

I think participation may work best for all concerned when each of the key interests – the stakeholders – is satisfied with the level of participation at which they are involved.

That is, those who don't have much at stake may be

happy to be informed or consulted. Others will want to be involved in decisions and possibly action to carry them out.

The difficult task for the practitioner managing the process is to identify these interests, help them work out what they want, and negotiate a route for them to achieve it.

The power of the practitioner lies in influencing who will benefit. Participation is not a neutal process. As yourself:

■ What is the purpose of the process?

■ Who benefits? Who pays? Who controls?

With different interests seeking different levels of participation, and being in different phases, effective participation can seem like shooting an arrow through a number of keyholes.

Level of participation

Phase in the process
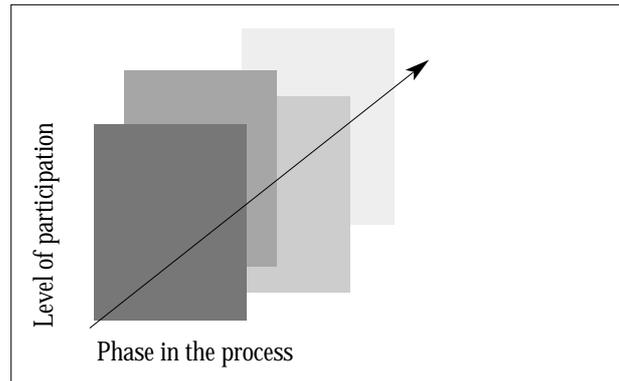
## *Some early questions*

At the start of a participation process a number of key questions should help you decide your approach:

■ Who are you? For example:

■ Someone in a position of power controlling funds or other resources.

■ Someone with influence because you are planning or managing a participation process.

■ Someone with professional expertise or knowledge?

■ What do you want to achieve by working a participatory style?

■ To try and develop plans that meet people's expectations.

■ To give people a say in the plans.

■ To give people control over the solutions.

■ Who will have the final say over decisions?

■ Yourself.

■ A management team.

■ Everyone who gets involved.

■ A political institution or other body

■ How ready are people, and organisations, to work in a participatory way?

■ Do they have the desire?

■ Do they have the skills?

■ Do they have the authority?

# Where do you stand?

One of the main ideas in the guide is that of level of participation, and the an organisation promoting participation takes a stance about the level it suggests is appropriate for different interests. This section deals with five levels.

## Choosing a level – taking a stance

The previous section developed the idea of levels of participation based on Arnstein's ladder described in 10 Key ideas. Here each level is dealt with in more detail, with suggestions on where it is appropriate.

This section, as others, is written on the assumption that you are promoting or managing a participation process. Your precise role will affect what stance you take.

For example, if you are controlling resources you may be very clear and firm about how much say you are prepared to offer others. If you are acting as a neutral facilitator you may be helping different interests negotiate appropriate levels.

For further discussion of these issues, see Some early questions at the end of the previous section, the items on Power and Role of the practitioner.

## Stance 1: Information

*information is giving out; communication is getting through.*
*Sydney Harris.*

Information-giving underpins all other levels of participation, and may be appropriate on its own in some circumstances. However, you will hit problems if all you offer is information and people are expecting you to provice for more involvement.

### Basics

■ The information-giving stance is essentially a 'take it or leave it' approach.

■ People may not accept they can't have a say. Is there really no alternative to the ideas you are putting forward?

■ Your information will be judged on who you are and your style as well as what you say.

■ Even though you may not want much feedback, put yourself in the place of the people you are communicating with: the meaning of any communication lies in the response that you get – not what you say.

### Where appropriate

Information-only may be appropriate when:

■ You have no room for manoeuvre and must follow one course of action – for example, where there is a clear legal requirement.

■ An authority is reporting a course of action which is essentially internal and doesn't affect others.

■ At the start of a consultation or other process, with the promise of more opportunity to participate later.

Information-only is inappropriate when the following apply (alternative stances in brackets):

■ You are seeking to empower community interests. Information is necessary for empowerment, but seldom enough on its own (3, 4 or 5).

■ There are alternatives and others have a legitimate interest in developing them (3 or 4).

### Methods

See the A-Z for methods to use with this and other levels. Consider the following:

■ Print: leaflets, newsletters, etc.

■ Presentations at meetings.

■ Briefing the media through press releases and press conferences.

■ Advertising through posters, radio, press.

■ Film or video.

Avoid:

■ Any methods which imply that people can have a say.

### Guidelines

In planning how to inform people, and carrying this out:

■ Consider what frame of mind your audience is in – for example, what do they expect or know already?

■ Try a simple presentation on colleagues or a less informed audience before you prepare materials.

■ Use language and ideas which your audience will find familiar.

■ Be clear about why you are just informing rather than consulting.

### Possible problems

*You have a low budget.*
Concentrate on using existing channels of communication: local groups, media, simple posters or leaflets. Be prepared to answer questions.

*The PR department of your organisation wants to take over communications.*
Insist on getting the basic messages clear before anything gets 'glossed up'. Work on one product – say a leaflet – and use that as the reference for other things. Make sure you have internal agreement to any messages.

*You get no response from the audience you are addressing.*
Since you are not asking people to become involved, that may be understandable. However, ask a few people to play back to

you what they understood from your communication to see that you have got your message across.

*People want more say.*
Do they have a case? Who is setting the rules? Take comments seriously. It is easier to change the level of participation and your stance early on. Later it may become an uncomfortable U-turn.

## *Information checklist*

Before taking up an information-giving stance consider:

● Are you clear which interests you are informing, and how much they know already?

● Are they likely to be satisfied with only information?

● Can you present your proposals in a way people will understand and relate to?

● Have you identified appropriate communication methods for the time available and audience?

● Are you prepared to change your stance if people want more than information?

# Stance 2: consultation

Consultation is appropriate when you can offer people some choices on what you are going to do – but not the opportunity to develop their own ideas or participate in putting plans into action.

## Basics

■ Consultation means giving people a restricted choice and role in solutions. You may consult on the problems, offer some options, allow comment, take account and then proceed – perhaps after negotiation. You are not asking for help in taking action.

■ All the basics of information-giving apply, plus the need to handle feedback.

## Where appropriate

The consultation stance is likely to be most appropriate when:

■ You want to improve a service.

■ You have a clear vision and plans to implement a project or programme , and there appear to be a limited range of options.

■ These options can be set out in terms which community interests can understand and relate to their own concerns or needs.

■ The initiator of the proposals can handle feedback and is prepared to use this to choose between or modify options.

It is inappropriate when the following apply (alternative stances in brackets):

■ You aren't going to take any notice of what people say.

■ You are seeking to empower community interests (3, 4 or 5).

■ You are not clear what you wish to do and are seeking ideas (3 or 4).

■ You don't have the resources or skills to carry out the

options presented, or other means of implementing (choose stance 4 or 5).

## Methods

Consider the following methods for consultation:

■ Surveys and market research.

■ Consultative meetings.

■ Consultative committees.

■ Simulations where the options and constraints are clear.

These methods may be used in conjunction with information-giving and presentational techniques, for example:

■ Advertisements.

■ Media briefing.

■ Leaflets and posters.

■  Exhibitions.

■ Videos.

## Guidelines

■ Consider what response you want and how you will handle it as well as what you are presenting.

■ Make clear how realistic the different options are, and what the pros and cons are as you see them.

■ Avoid using methods like Planning for Real which encourage people to put forward their own ideas, unless you are moving to stance 3 – deciding together.

■ Be open about your own role, who ultimately takes decisions, how and when this will be done.

■ If you set up a consultative committee, give it clear terms of reference.

## Possible problems

*You have a low budget.*
Use basic information-giving methods plus meetings hosted by local organisations. Run an open meeting at the end of the process.

*The PR department wants to take it over.*
See information giving. Consider throughout: will people understand the options, are they realistic, can we respond to feedback.

*You don't have time to do things properly.*
Be honest about the deadlines, and use the time-pressure to advantage. You could, for example, hold a weekend event with the key interests.

*You get more – or less – response than expected.*
Was consultation the appropriate stance? Did you think it through from the audience's point of view?

# Stance 3: deciding together

Deciding together is a difficult stance because it can mean giving people the power to choose without fully sharing the responsibility for carrying decisions through.

## Basics

■ Deciding together means accepting other people's ideas, then choosing from options you have developed together.

■ The basics of consultation apply, plus the need to generate options together, choose between them, and agree ways forward.

■ The techniques are more complex.

■ People need more confidence to get involved.

■ The time scale for the process is likely to be much longer.

## Where appropriate

Deciding-together may be appropriate when:

■ It is important that other people 'own' the solution.

■ You need fresh ideas.

■ There is enough time.

Deciding together is inappropriate when the following apply (try alternative stances in brackets).

■ You have little room for manoeuvre (1 or 2).

■ You can't implement decisions yourself (4 or 5).

## Methods

Consider the following methods:

■ Information-giving methods to start the process.

■ Stakeholder analysis to identify who should be involved.

■ SWOT analysis to understand where you are.

■ Brainstorming, Nominal Group Technique, Surveys to develop some options.

■ Cost/Benefit Analysis to make choices.

■ Strategic Choice, Planning for Real, and other simulations as powerful overall techniques.

■ SAST and Action Planning to decide what next.

## Guidelines

■ Plan the process before you start. Give yourself enough time.

■ Define clearly the roles and responsibilities of the different interests – who has a say, who will take action.

■ Be open and honest about what you want to achieve, and any limits on options.

■ If you set up any organisational structures, agree clear terms of reference and powers.

## Possible problems

*You don't have the time.*
Consider whether stance 2 – consulting people – would be more appropriate.

*You are not sure if your colleagues will back up any decisions.*
Involve them in the process. Run internal workshops before involving others.

*People aren't interested in joining in.*
Spend more time on preliminary networking – basically talking to people before holding any meetings. Run sessions hosted by existing organisations as well as open sessions.

*The techniques look too complicated.*
Try some of the easier ones with a small group that you know. Bring in an external trainer or facilitator.

# Stance 4: Acting together

Acting together may involve short-term collaboration or forming more permanent partnerships with other interests.

## Basics

■ Acting together in partnership involves both deciding together and then acting together

■ This means having a common language, a shared vision of what you want, and the means to carry it out.

■ Partners need to trust each other as well as agree on what they want to do.

■ Effective partnerships take a long time to develop – shot gun marriages are unlikely to work.

■ Each partner needs to feel they have an appropriate stake in the partnership, a fair say in what happens, and chance of achieving what they want.

## Where appropriate

Acting together may be appropriate when:

■ One party cannot achieve what they want on their own.

■ The various interests involved all get some extra benefit from acting together.

■ There is commitment to the time and effort needed to develop a partnership.

Acting together is not likely to be appropriate when the following apply (alternative stances in brackets):

■ One party holds all the power and resources and uses this to impose its own solutions (1 or 2).

■ The commitment to partnership is only skin deep (1 or 2).

■ People want to have a say in making decisions, but not a long term stake in carrying out solutions (3).

## Methods

Consider the following methods:

■ Information giving methods to start the process.

■ Methods for deciding together to create a shared vision.

■ Team building exercises.

■ Design exercises.

■ Business planning exercises.

■ Interim structures like working parties and steering groups as a focus for decision making and accountability.

■ Longer-term structures through which you can work together.

## Guidelines

As for Deciding together, plus...

■ Spend time getting to know and trust each other.

■ Plan for the long-term sustainability of any organisational structure that is needed to implement and maintain schemes.

■ Avoid staffing partnership organisations with people who are accountable to only one of the partners.

■ Develop a common language, shared vision and corporate accountability.

## Possible problems

*Early discussion focuses on constitutions.*
The final structure should come last – after you have decided what you are going to do, how to get the resources, what skills you need, and how power and responsibility will be shared. Set up interim structures like a steering group with clear terms of reference.

*Conflicts arise in steering group meetings.*
Spend more time in workshop sessions and informal meetings

to develop a shared vision and mutual understanding.

*Some interests feel excluded.*
Clarify who the stakeholders are, and what their legitimate interests are. Again, run workshops rather than committees. Use an independent facilitator.

### *Acting together checklist*

Before taking up a 'acting together ' stance consider:

● Are you clear about what you want to achieve, and how flexible you are in pursuing that vision?

● Have you identified potential partners?

● Do you have any evidence that they share a similar vision, and are interested in a partnership with you to achieve it?

● Do they trust you?

● Do you have the time and commitment necessary to form a partnership?

● Are you prepared to share power?

# Stance 5: Supporting local initiatives

***There are no free lunches.***
*Anon.*

Supporting independent community-based initiatives means helping others develop and carry out their own plans. Resource-holders who promote this stance may, of course, put limits on what they will support.

## Basics

■ This is the most 'empowering' stance –provided people want to do things for themselves. They may, quite properly, choose a lower level of participation.

■ Carrying through the stance may involve people in setting up new forms of organisations to handle funds and carry out projects or programmes.

■ The process has to be owned by, and move at the pace of, those who are going to run the initiative – although funders and others may set deadlines.

## Where appropriate

This stance may be appropriate:

■ Where there is a commitment to empower individuals or groups within the community.

■ Where people are interested in starting and running an initiative .

It is not likely to be appropriate when the following apply (alternative stances in brackets):

■ Community initiatives are seen as 'a good thing' in the abstract and pushed on people from the top down. (1,2,3).

■ Where there is no commitment to training and support.

■ Where there aren't the resources to maintain initiatives in the longer-term.

■ Where time is very short.

## Methods

■ An offer of grants, advice and support – perhaps conditional on some commitment being made by the other interests involved.

■ Workshops for helping community groups create a shared vision and plan their action.

■ Team building exercises.

■ Commitment planning.

■ Business planning exercises.

■ Workshops on design, fund-raising and publicity.

■ Visits to similar projects.

■ Interim structures like working parties and steering groups as a focus for decision making and accountability.

■ Longer-term structures controlled by community interests.

■ Development trusts.

## Guidelines

■ Be clear about your role and whether produces any conflict between, for example, controlling resources and helping community interests develop their own ideas and organisation.

■ If you are controlling resources make sure you have agreement from your colleagues and can deliver what you promise before you start.

■ If you are acting as a facilitator or trainer make sure the resource-holders are involved in the process. If possible run internal workshops with them.

■ Be realistic about the time the process will take.

## Possible problems

*Community interests find it difficult to get organised.*
Provide support and, if necessary training. Arrange visits to similar projects elsewhere. Treat people development as seriously as project development.

*The steering group or other body cannot make decisions.*
Organise workshop sessions outside formal committees.

*Little happens between meetings.*
End each meeting with an action planning session. If funds are available appoint a development worker. Keep in contact through a regularly produced newsletter.

*Community interests become committed to action, but resource-holders can't deliver.*
Run internal sessions to gain commitment within the supporting organisations. Use the media.

# Stances in summary

| Level/stance | Information | Consultation | Deciding together | Acting together | Supporting |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Typical process** | **Presentation and promotion** | **Communication and feedback** | **Consensus building** | **Partnership building** | **Community development** |
| **Typical methods** | Leaflets Media Video | Surveys Meetings | Workshops Planning for Real Strategic Choice | Partnership bodies | Advice Support Funding |
| **Initiator stance** | 'Here's what we are going to do' | 'Here's our options – what do you think?' | 'We want to develop options and decide actions together' | "We want to carry out joint decisions together' | "We can help you achieve what you want within these guidelines' |
| **Initiator benefits** | Apparently least effort | Improve chances of getting it right | New ideas and commitment from others | Brings in additional resources | Develops capacity in the community and may reduce call on services |
| **Issues for initiator** | Will people accept bo consultation? | Are the options realistic? Are there others? | Do we have similar ways of deciding? Do we know and trust each other? | Where will the balance of control lie? Can we work together? | Will our aims be met as well as those of other interests? |
| **Needed to start ...** | Clear vision Identified audience Common language | Realistic options Ability to deal with responses | Readiness to accept new ideas and follow them through | Willingness to learn new ways of working | Commitment to continue support |

## Notes to the table

The table summarises ideas from the section on stances.

The typical process row makes a link with the types of processes usually associated with the level. Higher levels are likely to involve some elements of lower ones too – you can't build partnerships without communicating well and developing consensus. Community development is not limited to supporting.

Typical methods gives some examples of the structures and methods used.

The initiator stance row suggests how the initiator might present themselves and the level they are working at to others.

The **initiator** benefits row suggests what the initiator might have in mind – but this will obviously depend on the situation. If the initiator is being open, this agenda should be made obvious. People are generally sensitive to hidden agendas: they may not know quite what is going on, but suspicion breeds mistrusts and undermines the chances of collaboration.

Needed to start... suggests some of the prerequisites for success – that is, pitfalls if you don't get them right. As with the process row some at the top also require those lower down.

The diagram is meant to be an aid to thinking, rather than a rigid framework. The idea of an initiator taking a stance should be useful, for example, in helping an authority think through what it is trying to achieve. However, you should recognise it may be necessary to change stance. For example:

■ An information giving process may lead to protests, and turn into a consultation or joint decision-making process.

■ An authority may invite people to join in a partnership or joint decision-making process, only to find that most people just want to be consulted on a limited range of options.

# It takes time

**O**ften participation is treated as a limited set of events – a survey, an exhibition, one or two meetings. However, if participation is to be more than superficial consultation it must be treated as a process which takes some time. This section deals with the main phases of participation, and stresses that success depends on careful preparation.

## The participation process

The Framework section suggested treating participation as a process which has four main phases:

■ Initiation

■ Preparation

■ Participation

■ Continuation

Of course, in reality life is never that tidy, and we find that we are pitched into trying to do things without enough planning. Often it is difficult to see what to do before trying something out, and reflecting on what happened. It may only be then that we find out what the real problem is.

This cycle goes on throughout any process to carry out a project or programme. Participation is no different. Because participation doesn't run on predetermined tracks it isn't possible to set out a step by step guide – every situation
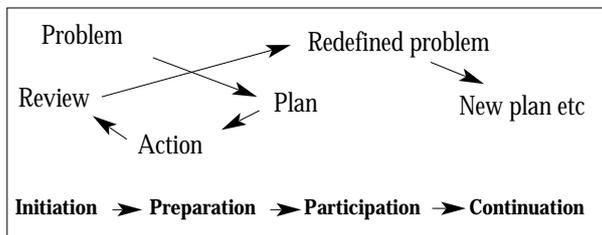


will be different. However there are some key issues which keep cropping up, and some are more important in particular phases. The questions and checklists in this section all relate back to the main question set in the *Signposts from theory to practice* section.

## Initiation

The process of participation may be triggered in many ways:

■ A campaign of protest may be turned into a more collaborative programme of action.

■ An authority may promote a project.

■ Government may announce funding is available for community-based projects.

Often situations will be messy and unclear, with different people and groups having different views of what is going on. In order to move into a planned process of participation, it is important to start asking some key questions. These will recur in different forms throughout.

For guidance see the section *Guidelines on how to ...,* and A-Z

entries on *Aims and objectives, Confidence, Levels of participation, Stakeholders, SWOT.*

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### *An outline agenda*

● Who is going to champion the process?

● Who pays? Who administers? Who convenes ?

● What are you trying to achieve through participation?

● Who are the key interests in the community?

● Who are the key interests within any organisation promoting participation, and what are their attitudes?

● What level of participation is likely to be appropriate and acceptable?

● How will you know when you have succeeded?

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## Preparation

As these key issues become clearer, it is important to prepare on three fronts:

■ Initial spadework with whoever is promoting the process.

■ Agreeing the approach with key interests.

■ Developing a strategy.

Most experienced facilitators and trainers agree that 80% of successful participation lies in preparation – so don't skimp on it .

### Spadework with the promoter

In my experience the toughest problems in participation processes do not stem from apathy, ignorance or lack of skills among residents or other community interests. Given time and effort these can be worked through.

The most intractable problems arise because organisations promoting participation aren't clear about what they want to achieve, are fearful of sharing control, and seldom speak with one voice.

Unless these issues are tackled at the outset they are likely to lead to frustration, conflict and disillusion further down the line. The key issue is, what does the promoting organisation want from the participation process? The most common goals are:

■ Improving the quality of the outcome – the project or programme.

■ Developing the capabilities of the participants.

■ Building working relationships of benefit for the future.

■ Increasing ownership and the acceptability of the outcome.

In preparing a participation process it is important to consider the mix of these desired goals, and whether they are they realistic. In particular, is there the internal commitment within the organisation to bring them about? A group of experienced practitioners who discussed these issues at the Gorbals workshop in November 1993, developed the following checklist.

If you are acting as the manager of the participation process it is important that the internal 'client' understands, agrees and values your role.

In order to achieve this understanding it is a good idea to apply participation techniques to the internal process with the client After this experience they are more likely to understand the techniques you use and support you when you apply them externally.

## Understanding key interests

Before starting the formal processes of producing leaflets, calling meetings or running workshops it is important to understand who's who and what outcomes they may be looking for. Here's a checklist of some of the early tasks and issues:

■ Consider the potential obstacles to participation, for example: rigid views, authoritarian cultures, grudges and antagonisms, passive and hard-to-reach interest groups, NlMBYs (Not in My Back Yard), professionals and technicians with poor communication skills, groups defending perceived power and status, or lacking the confidence, skills, or knowledge to participate. How will these be managed?

■ Meet the key agencies and lobbies. Get out and network formally and informally. Open new lines of communication. Meet one-to-one when possible to encourage candid responses.

■ There are four main groups of participants: politicians; decision makers and resource holders; activists; and ordinary people. How will you get beyond the (often self-appointed) activists? How will you pro-actively involve hard-to-reach groups?

■ Not everyone has an equal stake: build in different levels of involvement for different levels of commitment. Not everyone needs to be involved in every issue at every level and at every stage.

■ Help the parties decide how their representatives will relate to their constituencies.

■ Research the availability of additional resources. Bring potential funders into the process.

■ Get back to the client and gain assent to the process design.

## Agreeing the approach – a strategy

After discussions with the internal client and external interests, you should be able to develop a strategy for the participation process. The precise nature of the strategy will, of course, depend upon circumstances and the level of participation sought with different interests. These issues are dealt with in more detail in the 'How to...' section. Here are some of the main points to cover:

Some of these issues may have to evolve with the process: it may not be possible to agree everything at the start. If it seems worth the risk, you may just have to get some action off the ground and work out the details as you go along. You should also:

■ Bear in mind that people have limited patience and attention spans: how will you deal with long lead times?

■ Be sure everyone understands the constraints: what the process will not achieve for them. Unrealistic expectations can only lead to disillusionment.

■ Be realistic about what can be achieved with the time and resources available.

See also items in the A-Z on *Action plans, Budgets for participation, Communication, Workshops.*

# Participation

During this phase you will be running events, producing printed materials and using a range of methods. The *Guidelines on how to...* section and A-Z items provide detailed guidance.

The following are some of tips which emerged from brainstorming sessions with experienced practitioners about this phase of the process:

■ Don't underestimate people. Give them tools to manage complexity don't, shield them from it.

■ Divide the issues into bite-sized chunks.

■ Start with people's own concerns and the issues relevant to them. Don't superimpose your own ideas and solutions at the outset.

■ Help people widen their perceptions of the choices available and to clarify the implications of each option.

■ Build in visible early successes to develop the confidence of participants. 'Staircase' skills, trust and commitment to the process: offer a progressive range of levels of involvement and help people to move up the ladder.

■ Direct empowerment training for participants may not be appreciated – it may be better to develop skills more organically as part of the process.

■ If at all possible, avoid going for a comprehensive irreversible solution. Set up an iterative learning process, with small, quick, reversible pilots and experiments.

■ Continuously review and widen membership. As new interests groups are discovered how will they be integrated into the process?

■ Help people to build their understanding of complex and remote decision processes which are outside the delegated powers of the participation process but which are affecting the outcomes.

■ Nurture new networks and alliances.

■ Plans must be meaningful and lead to action.

■ Manage the link between the private ability of the various interest groups to deliver on their commitments and the public accountability and control of the implementation.

■ Build in opportunities for reflection and appraisal.

■ Make sure people are having fun!

# Continuation

The final phase in a participation process. By this time it should be clear how any agreed proposals are going to be taken forward. How this is done will depend very much on the level of participation.

At one level – of consultation – you may have worked through some prepared options with different interests and then agreed to take the results away for evaluation and implementation.

At another level – working together – you may be setting up new partnership organisations.

# Postscript

Groups and organisations, like relationships, go through recognisable stages. The early stages have been described as:

■ Forming: coming together as a group, getting to know each other, deciding what the group's concerns and emphases should be.

■ Storming: coming to terms with differences within the group.

■ Norming: agreeing objectives, priorities, procedures, ways of relating to each other.

■ Performing: getting on with the work, without having to spend a lot of time and energy deciding what needs doing and how it should be done.

All of this is difficult enough in a group which meets frequently, or in a formal organisation. It should be no

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### *Final checklist*

● Did we achieve what we set out to do in the process?

● Were the key interests happy with the level of involvement?

● Have we reported back to people on the outcomes?

● Are responsibilities clear for carrying projects forward?

● Are there major lessons we can learn for the next time?

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surprise that it is even more complex in a participation process when so many different interests have to find a common vision. Don't be discouraged!

# Signposts from theory to practice

This section sets out how I have designed some of the signposting in this Guide – the cross-references from problems to participation techniques. It is rather theoretical, and if you wish you can skip it and move to the next sections.

## The nature of signposting

The original idea of this guide was to help practitioners who subscribe to the 'why' of participation find their way to the 'how'. In practice signposting is complex for several reasons:

■ Every situation is unique.

■ Participation methods are not just quick-fix tools for success – they often require skill and experience in their application.

■ The methods are not always easy to find – there are not many participation 'toolkits'

For these reasons, this section – and the complementary *'Guidelines on how to...'* section – cannot provide a step by step manual. Instead I have tried to offer a number of ways of looking at the route from participation problems to solutions, with some pointers to topics and methods which are detailed in the *A-Z section.*

## The starting point – problems

***We only think when we are confronted with a problem.***
*John Dewey.*

Whatever level of participation you are offering, and whatever phase you are in, there will be problems.

■ People will not read your leaflets or come to meetings.

■ Colleagues will fail to deliver on their promises.

■ Different interest groups will have conflicting aims.

■ Deadlines will be missed.

■ You may end up as the scapegoat for everyone's difficulties. So what do you do when the going gets tough? Reach for a solution – a participation tool or method. You may go and talk to people, produce another piece of paper, run a workshop, set up a committee, or perhaps give someone else the job. The later section on Problems suggests which methods may be most appropriate in common situations. But what do we mean by participation methods?

## The end point – participation methods

The methods for participation included in the guide fall broadly under three headings – techniques, structures and longer-term programmes.

## Techniques

Techniques are frequently used short-term interventions employed by consultants and trainers. They range from communication materials and simple workshop sessions through to more complex methods of decision-making, like Strategic Choice.

They can be very useful ways of concentrating efforts to involve people, but should not be seen as 'quick fixes'. Participation takes time, and techniques should usually be part of a long-term programme, or related to a structure – see below.

## Structures

Both interim and longer-term organisational structures are used in participation processes. They range from working parties and advisory committees to organisations like development trusts, and community-based coops.

Local councils and similar organisations often favour structures because they mirror or can be linked to their committee systems and the procedures which go with them. They can stand in the way of real participation for those involved unless their purpose is clear, the balance of control or influence is agreed, and their proceedings are enlivened by workshop techniques.

## Longer-term programmes

These are processes for participation, planned over a period of time, which may involve staff devoted partly or wholly to the programme as well as the use of techniques and structures.

## The bridge – key issues

The problems in participation processes seem to relate to about 15 underlying issues. If can spot the issue, by asking the right questions, you may be able to find a participation method to use. I have listed what I think are the key issues below, with some signposts to methods.

| Problems in participation | Key issues<br>• Questions<br>• Questions | Methods<br>• Techniques<br>• Structure<br>• Programmes |
|---|---|---|
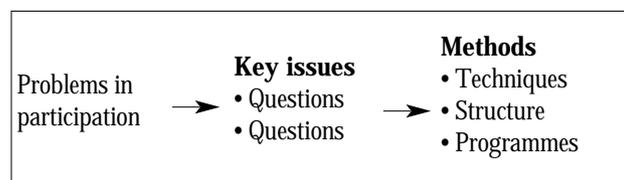
**1 Taking stock: Situation assessment**

■ What else is happening which might affect us?

■ Who are the key interests?

■ What are the barriers to action?

■ Who holds the power, and are they prepared to share it?

*See CATWOE, Community profiling, Stakeholders, Surveys, SWOT.*

### 2  Taking stock: Self assessment

■ What do we feel able to do?

■ How confident are we?

*See Capacity-building, Skills audit, SWOT.*

### 3  Clarifying purpose, values and vision

■ What are we trying to achieve?

■ What will it seem like if we succeed?

*See Aims and objectives, Mission, Nominal Group Technique, Outcomes, Purpose, Vision.*

### 4  Roles

■ What part am I and others playing in the process?

■ What responsibilities do we each have?

*See Accountability, Recruitment, Roles.*

### 5  Increasing commitment

■ How can we get people to play an active part?

■ Why are people not interested?

■ Are my colleagues with me?

*See Apathy, Commitment, Ownership.*

### 6  Communication

■ Are we talking the same language?

■ Do we understand each other?

*See Communication, Meetings, Presentations.*

### 7  Developing criteria

■ What do we think is most important?

■ Do we agree on priorities and values?

■ How do we use this to choose between different options?

*See Criteria, Evaluation, Values.*

### 8  Negotiation

■ How can we reach agreement on what to do and how to do it?

*See Negotiation, Outcomes.*

### 9  Getting resources

■ What money, advice and other resources will we need?

*See Fundraising, Resources.*

### 10  Developing skills/capacities

■ How will we develop the ability to work with others and achieve what we want?

*See Capacity-building, Skills audit.*

### 11  Generating options

■ How can we think creatively to produce a number of different possible options for solutions?

*See Brainstorming, Creative thinking, Ideas, Options, Nominal Group Technique.*

### 12  Making decisions

■ How can we choose between the different options and work out what to do next?

*See Action plans, Cost/Benefit Analysis, Strategic choice.*

### 13  Developing structure

■ What type of organisation may we need – either in the short term to make decisions, or in the longer-term to carry out plans?

*See Business planning, Competence, Constitutions, Structures.*

### 14  Managing structure

■ How will we run any organisation?

■ What skills and resources will we need?

*See Competence, Governance, Management.*

### 15  Evaluating progress

■ How will we judge whether we are succeeding or failing

*See Criteria, Evaluation.*

## When the issues arise

The set of issues listed above crop up at all phases in the process, but some are more important than others at different points. Similarly, some techniques are important in different phases. The table overleaf illustrates where and when key issues may arise.

# A *community participation question set*

To ensure a broad. coherent approach to community participation, consider the following:

## 1 Commitment

Has the nature and extent of commitment to participation. amongst all those involved, been made clear at the outset? Have major differences been addressed?

## 2 Education for participation

Has some opportunity been provided to ensure some positive 'induction' to the participation process for local people, professionals, elected members and others?

## 3 Applicability

Has it been decided whether, and in what general ways, a participative approach is applicable to all types of specific project or continuing initiative?

## 4 Initiation

Has something been done to ensure that the pattern and detail of participation activity is not determined totally by whoever initiates it? Is there a shared feeling of 'ownership'?

## 5 Scope

Within a general principle of attempting to achieve the fullest possible involvement on any project, are all parties clear about, and do they accept, the level of participation on offer?

## 6 Delivering agreed scope

Are those in positions of power to influence the end outcome (elected members, officers, developers, funders) able to deliver the agreed level of involvement? (If it cannot be delivered, it should not be offered.)

## 7 All Stages

Is participation being started as early as possible in the planning and development process, and how can you make it something which should go right through from initiation to completion (and even into later community management)?

## 8 Defining Overall Community

Have the definitions of 'area' and 'overall community', used to determine who has an opportunity to be involved, been negotiated with all parties. and how will they be redefined if necessary as work proceeds?

## 9 Engaging Communities

Have the ground rules for how the many sub-communities within the area are defined, located and accessed been considered at the outset and agreed with all parties, and how will it be enlarged and extended as work proceeds?

## 10 Approach

Have those managing the involvement process, along with other parties, agreed an overall, coherent approach which ensures that all relevant issues are addressed and which considers the participation process over time?

## 11 Relevant Methods

Have the methods to be used been carefully chosen to relate closely to the scope of the work, the definitions of communities used the stage of the involvement and the available skills and resources?

## 12 Range of methods

In general, is a range of methods to be used in order to increase the chances of engaging the largest number of people?

## 13 Resources

Have all resources available for the work been assessed, considered and valued – including 'work equity' by community groups and others? Is there agreement about how those resources are best disposed throughout the work?

## 14 Management

Through what means will those managing the participation process ensure that the manner in which work is handled creates a sense of trust within the community about the fairness and neutrality of the process?

## 15 Resolution

Has there been consideration at an early stage of the manner in which the many views and ideas emerging from the participation process are assembled, weighted and used in relation to reaching any decisions? In particular, who will do this?

## 16 Going forward

Has thought been given to how practice should be evaluated in retrospect and time given, for all parties, to consider how best to take forward the lessons learned into subsequent involvement activity?
..... and finally:

## 17 Context

What general support is there from your organisation, is the time right to be doing this, are there any specific 'windows of opportunity' you can use to get things going? Where are the enemies and the barriers likely to come? Can you influence any of these?

*This question set was supplied by consultants BDOR.*

| Phases/ levels | Initiation | Preparation – internally |
|---|---|---|
| **Supporting independent community initiatives** | What triggered proposals for support? What do you want to achieve? What boundaries are you setting? | Can you set out clearly what you are offering, and who can apply? Are you being honest about what you want out of it, and how you will judge success? Who are you particularly aiming to help? What is the risk of cuts in support? |
| **Acting together** | Why do you need to work in partnership with others? Who has similar concerns? What skills and resources do you have? What balance of control do you envisage? | Why should people want to join you? What resources will you put on offer? Are people internally prepared to share control with others? |
| **Deciding together** | Why do you want to involve other people substantially? What boundaries are there on what you will/can do? Who do you see as the other key interests? | How will you and others generate ideas on what to do? Are roles clear? How open are you about who eventually takes action? Would you move to 'Acting together' if pressed? Do people agree internally? |
| **Consultation** | What prompted the idea of consultation? Are you looking at the real problem? Are you confident you have have all the answers? | How will you develop the options for consultation, and gain agreement internally? What will you say about putting proposals into practice? Will you take people's responses seriously? |
| **Information** | What triggered the need to inform people? Who are they? Will they be satisfied with information-only? Do you need to overcome past mistrust? | Are key interests within the the organisation agreed on the message and the audience? Will you accept any feedback? What methods are appropriate? How will you know whether the message has got through? |

| Preparation –<br>with key interests | Participation | Continuation |
|---|---|---|
| Do you know what the needs and other interests are?<br>Do you know what support they will need? | Can you provide support for groups setting up their project or organisation?<br>Do you have ways of keeping in touch with what is happing? | Can you provide or recommend support for groups?<br>How will you keep in touch?<br>Do you have agreed monitoring and evaluation methods? |
| Do you have an appropriate interim structure and methods for deciding/acting together?<br>Are people comfortable together and committed?<br>Do you need to get other people involved? | Can you agree on a joint vision?<br>Do you and others have the skills, resources, structures and commitment to carry it out?<br>Can you produce a development plan? | Is the structure sustainable?<br>Do you have appropriate administrative, training and financial systems? |
| Have you contacted key interests informally?<br>Are people comfortable and confident to participate on the terms you are offering? | Do you have appropriate methods for making choices together?<br>Do you have an appropriate structure for decisions?<br>Will you implement agreed decisions? | Will you need a continuing input of skills and resources from elsewhere? If so, does that mean moving to 'Acting together'? |
| Are people liklely to accept your options? If not, should you move to deciding or acting together?<br>Will people understand what you are offering? | Are people accepting your options?<br>Is there pressure for more say?<br>Do you need to gain the support of more people?<br>Do you have machinery for analysing the responses? | Are you asking people for continuing feedback? If so, how? |
| Is the information-onlystance likely to be accepted?<br>Will people understand what you are saying? | Is your message getting through?<br>Do people accept it?<br>If not, should you consult or decide/act together on a wider range of options? | How will you keep people informed? |

# Guidelines

I t is tempting to say that every situation is so different that general guidelines on participation are misleading – but that isn't much comfort to anyone trying to work out how to start. So here are ten principles intended to get you thinking, rather than provide firm rules. Cross references are provided to other main sections and items in the A-Z, and further guidelines on the main tasks are given later. This section – as others – is written for someone managing a participation process.

**1** Ask yourself what you wish to achieve from the participation process, and what you want to help others achieve. What is the purpose?

*See A Framework for participation. Beneficiaries, Purpose.*

**2** Identify the different interests within a community that you wish to involve, and put yourself in their shoes.

*See Community, Stakeholders.*

**3** Clarify your own role and whether you are wearing too many hats – for example, communicator of information, facilitator of ideas, controller of resources.

*See Accountability, Role of the Practitioner.*

**4** Consider what balance to strike between keeping control and gaining other people's commitment, and what levels of participation this suggests for different interests.

*See Where do you stand?*

**5** Invest as much effort in preparation as participation with outside interests.

*See It takes time, Preparation*

**6** Run internal participation processes to make sure your own organisation is committed and can deliver.

*See It takes time, Preparation.*

**7** Be open and honest about what you are offering or seeking, and communicate in the language of those you are aiming to involve .

*See Communication, Trust.*

**8** Make contact informally with key interests before running any formal meetings.

*See It takes time, Networking, Preparation.*

**9** Build on existing organisations and networks – but don't use them as the only channel of communication and involvement.

*See Networking, Voluntary sector.*

**10** Consider the time and resources you will need.

*See It takes time.*

# How to …

This section takes the guidelines above and issues discussed in the more theoretical sections and suggests how to tackle the main tasks likely to crop up in a participation process. It does so by looking at the key issues from a number of angles, providing checklists, and signposting you on to more detail to other sections in the guide and items in the *A-Z section*. However, it should be treated as guidance only – not a step-by-step manual.

## …clarify why you want to involve others

Why is it necessary to involve other people? Is it for your benefit, theirs, or both?

**1** Consider what you are trying to achieve at the end of the day, and why this may be best done with others.

*See Benefits of participation, Barriers to participation, Outcomes.*

**2** List the key interests who will have to be involved, both within your organisation and without.

*See Stakeholder analysis.*

**3** After following the steps below, try out your ideas informally on a few people you know.

## …understand your role

Some of the greatest problems arise because those promoting or managing participation are wearing too many different hats.

**1** Consider  the part you may be expected to play in a participation process:

■ Someone who controls resources?

■ A go-between?

■ A representative of an interest group?

■ Some who will initiate, plan or manage the process?

■ Someone using participation techniques – producing newsletters, holding meetings, running workshops?

**2** If you are trying to do more than one of these, could there be conflicts? How will others see you? Can you split roles with someone else?

**3** See  earlier sections on *Where do you stand?* and *It takes time* for more detailed descriptions of what is involved in the process.

## …decide where you stand

One of the most important early decision is on the appropriate level of participation, or stance you will take.

**1** Clarify why you want to involve others, and your possible role – see early steps above.

**2** Read the *Framework for participation* section, and consider what level of participation is likely to be appropriate:

■ Information: telling people what you are going to do.

■ Consultation: offering people choices between options you have developed.

■ Deciding together: allowing others to contribute ideas and options, and deciding together.

■ Acting together: putting your choices into practice in partnership.

■ Supporting independent community initiatives: helping others carry out their own plans.

**3** Review who the key interests are, and what level of participation will be appropriate for each.

*See Stakeholders.*

## …prepare for participation

Experienced trainers and facilitators reckon that 80 per cent of the potential for success lies in preparing well before engaging with individuals and groups.

**1** See the Preparation section in *It Takes time.* Work through the internal agenda within your organisation. For example:

■ Are your colleagues agreed on what they wish to achieve, and the level of participation?

■ Have you flushed out any hidden agendas?

■ Will the organisation be able to deliver on any promises?

**2** Make contact informally with key interests.

■ Review the levels of participation different interests may seek.

■ Consider the possible obstacles which may occur, and the support you will need.

**3** Begin to develop a strategy which covers:

■ The main deadlines

■ Resources needed

■ Technical support available

*See the Signposts section, Budgets for participation, Timeline.*

## …choose participation methods

The *Easy answers section* outlines what can occur if you don't think through carefully what methods to use.

**1** See the *Signposts section* for a theoretical discussion, and pointers to topics and methods featured in the A-Z.

**2** In choosing a method consider:

■ Is it appropriate for the level of participation? For example, powerful techniques like Planning for Real which give everyone a say are not appropriate for consultation processes where you are really only offering people limited choices.

■ Do you have the necessary skills and resources? A slide show may be more effective than a video.

■ Can you follow through? There is no point doing a survey unless you can handle the responses and use the information.

■ Do you need help? An experienced trainer or facilitator may be necessary for some of the more complex methods.

### ...develop support within your organisation

Many participation processes fail because the organisations promoting the process cannot deliver when others respond.

**1** See *It takes time*. After reviewing the issues there and above (in ... prepare for participation):

**2** Use internally some of the techniques you plan to use externally:

■ Produce communication materials in draft.

■ Run workshop sessions.

■ Encourage others within the organisation to take ownership of the proposals, options or ideas and work them through informally with other interests. That is the best way to gain internal commitment or discover what problems may arise later.

*See Commitment planning, Ownership.*

### ... and develop your skills as an enabler

Although many of the techniques suggested in this guide are relatively simple, it takes some degree of confidence to run a workshop with community interests for the first time or perhaps argue through with colleagues the need for a long-term participation process. Here are a few suggestions on how to develop your confidence and capability:

■ Contact anyone within your organisation, or locally, with facilitation, training or general community development experience and talk through your plans.

■ Contact one of the organisations listed in this guide who offer training and support.

■ Find a low-risk opportunity to try running a workshop using some of the simpler techniques.

■ Or even better run a workshop jointly with an experienced practitioner – perhaps contacted through one of the organisations listed.

### ...choose an appropriate structure

Participation is not necessarily achieved just by setting up a forum, working group, committee, steering group or other structure. On the other hand, if you are planning or managing a participation process you will need some point of accountability, and the key interests may need to work together formally as well as creatively. In planning the process:

**1** Clarify to whom you are accountable at the outset.

**2** If you are working at the 'acting together' level of participation help key interests form a working group or steering group when appropriate.

**3** Review your role and accountability with that new group.

*See items on the structures mentioned, and Accountability, Structures for participation, Terms of reference.*

## Summary

Participation processes do not run on rails, and they cannot be set out as a linear step-by-step process. Each of the items above may be seen as a problem which has to be tackled, but not necessarily solved at one go. Bearing that in mind here is a summary of the main tasks.

### *The main tasks in summary*

**1** Clarify why the participation process is being started, who has the final say, and what your brief is.
*See Accountability, Aims and objectives, Mission.*

**2** Identify key community interests, including voluntary and community organisations.
*See Community profiling, Networking, Stakeholder analysis.*

**3** Consider the level of participation appropriate, make informal contacts to identify local concerns, and whether your stance – the level you are adopting – is likely to be acceptable.
*See Level of participation, Networking.*

**4** Run a workshop session(s) within your organisation to ensure key people are clear about the purpose of the participation process, the roles and responsibilities, and the answers to basic questions which will be asked when you go public.
*See Barriers to participation, Change in organisations, Workshops*

**5** Consider the stance (Inform, Consult etc) you are taking in more detail, and in the light of that decide on what methods you will use.
*See Levels of participation*

**6** Review whether your organisation will be able to respond to the feedback, and follow through on any decisions reached.
*See Change in organisations*

**7** Review your timescale, and prepare an action plan based on the level of participation.
*See Action planning*