Building Back With: Involving communities in the Covid-19 response and recovery

A handbook for local government

Version 1: October 2020

Edited by Involve

Help write this handbook

This handbook is intended to be a living document that we update over time as new issues, resources and case studies arise. A version of it will live on the Involve Knowledge Base, which we will periodically update based on changes to this document.

Just start writing or leave a comment in this document if you'd like to help improve the handbook.

Using this handbook

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Find out more.

01. Introduction

From how we continue to fight the pandemic, to what the new normal for our economy, environment and communities should look like, significant decisions need to be taken in the coming weeks and months with consequences that will be felt for years and decades.

This handbook is intended to support local authorities to consider how they can *build back with* their local communities, involving them in the Covid-19 response and recovery.

The handbook contains eight chapters, covering the following:

- **Chapter 2: Why involve people now** – the rationale for involving local communities in the Covid response and recovery;
- **Chapter 3: Before you start** – tips on making the case and securing institutional buy-in;
- **Chapter 4: Where to start** – some principles for planning high quality public engagement;
- **Chapter 5: Helpful resources** – a range of handy handbooks, guides and toolkits to help plan and deliver community engagement;
- **Chapter 6: Where it's happening** – examples and case studies engaging people in taking decisions and action around Covid;
- **Chapter 7: What it could look like** – illustrative processes to provide some inspiration for how communities could be engaged on different issues;
- **Chapter 8: Further reading** – links to interesting further reading on Covid, public participation and democracy.

How this handbook has been developed

This handbook has been developed as part of ["A democratic response to Covid"](#) – a joint project by Involve and the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Westminster University.

The handbook has been written by Involve in partnership with members of the Deliberative Democracy Practitioners' Network – a group of designers and facilitators of participatory and deliberative processes. It has been edited by Tim Hughes, director of Involve.

The title of this handbook is inspired by our friends at the Poverty Truth Network. Find out more about them at: www.povertytruthnetwork.org

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02. Why involve people now

Covid has raised significant questions and challenges across all aspects of how we live, work and play, and with that, how our economies and societies function.

How to respond to the immediate health crisis? When and how to transition out of lockdown and social distancing measures? What to do to restart the economy? How to lessen the economic hardship to come?

These are some of the most pressing and widely discussed challenges facing us, but alongside them sit other fundamental questions that will affect the future of our city and town centres, where we work, how we travel, how we care for people in older age, among many other facets of life. The consequences of how we address these questions will be felt for years and decades to come.

> It's important that local communities are involved in helping to address these challenges – offering their ideas and experiences; helping to make difficult trade-offs; and taking action.

Local authorities are faced with increasingly difficult challenges and choices which will affect local residents – from local lockdowns through to creating resilient economies on restricted budgets. It's important that local communities are involved in helping to address these challenges – offering their ideas and experiences; helping to make difficult trade-offs; and taking action. In this way, the local authority response to covid will have increased legitimacy and be responsive to the needs of communities.

While the rhetoric has been that "we are all in this together" and that Covid is the "great leveller", the reality has been very different. The health crisis and economic crisis that is following in its wake is being experienced in very different ways by different parts of our population. It has exacerbated existing inequalities and created new ones.

> Hearing the voices of those who are rarely listened to can radically change accepted opinions about what needs to be done.

Government policy and decision-making needs to reflect the diversity of lived experience of Covid. Our understanding and imaginations are limited by our own social experiences – politicians, civil servants, scientific experts are no different. Hearing the voices of those who are rarely listened to can radically change accepted opinions about what needs to be done. Diversity results in better decision-making.

Involving people can also lead to more trustworthy decisions that people are willing to accept. Responding to Covid in a way that gives meaning to the idea that "we are all in

this together" entails bringing the "we" into decision-making. When people can see that decisions reflect their lives and interests, trust and acceptance follow.

In short, we need to *build back with*.

03. Before you start

Before starting with implementing a participatory process, it is important to ensure that you have support from key internal and external stakeholders. Participatory processes that do not have this support risk doing more harm than good, by raising expectations in the community and not delivering on what is heard.

This chapter sets out a few things to think about before you start, as well as tips for making the case to stakeholders.

Securing stakeholder support

The design of a participation exercise is not simply about planning how to engage with the local community – engaging the internal and external stakeholders who will need to listen and respond is just as critical. It doesn't matter how good a community engagement process is, without that institutional buy-in it risks just becoming a talking shop, which will damage trust and future engagement.

A key part of this is being clear about how input from the community is going to dock into your decision-making processes and those of key partners. Is there a particular plan or strategy that it will inform? Will the findings and/or recommendations be considered at a council meeting? Being clear about this upfront is important for giving residents assurance that their engagement is worthwhile (while not overpromising), but also in ensuring that you can put the right processes in place to see it through.

Before you start with a community engagement process, therefore, you will need to think about who will need to be involved in hearing and responding to what the community says. It is advisable to engage these stakeholders as early as possible in the process, both to understand what the opportunity is for influence and to build their buy-in and ownership. As you do this, you will likely need to think about securing the support of senior officials and councillors who will champion the process and respond to the community.

As you do this, it is important to bear in mind that public views often do not map neatly onto organisational responsibilities and functions. A conversation that starts with public health, for example, could end up spanning across health service provision, built environment, natural environment, education and beyond. It may be necessary, therefore, to engage a wide range of internal and external stakeholders who have responsibility for related issues.

Engaging stakeholders should not just come at the beginning of the process. You will likely need to continue to maintain this engagement and buy-in throughout in order to keep the space open for the community to have influence. This can be challenging, as

competing organisational, political and/or contextual pressures build to make decisions and announcements as quickly as possible. One way of maintaining this stakeholder engagement – and also benefiting from different sources of insight, networks and (potentially) resources – is to involve key stakeholders in a programme or advisory group.

Making the case

As you look to engage stakeholders, you will want to think through the different arguments you can use to make the case for involving the community, and which are likely to be most influential. Here are some you could try.

This is an opportunity to:

- Actively hear from and engage with social groups whose voices have come to the fore through the pandemic. This will help the local authority to understand and be responsive to the diversity of lived experiences of Covid-19, new vulnerabilities that have emerged and changing expectations;

- Sustain community capacity over time by building on the growth of grassroots connections and the new local resources that have emerged such as the upsurge of local mutual aid groups;

- Foster trust with communities through engaging residents effectively in the difficult choices and trade-offs ahead;

- Build on the opportunities to engage with residents in new ways through the greater connectivity afforded by people's experience of using online platforms (whilst recognising the inclusion issues that still exist);

- Harness the appetite for change that Covid has highlighted – from responding to inequalities through to the climate crisis.

04. Where to start

It can be tempting to dive straight into thinking about specific methods and tools for engaging people. However, good quality engagement needs to be carefully designed from the ground up.

There are a wide range of considerations in planning public engagement. These can be boiled down into four key sets of questions:

1. **Why?** – What is your purpose for involving people?
2. **Where?** – What is the context in which you are engaging? What are the internal and external factors that you need to consider?
3. **Who?** – What is your target audience? How will you ensure that they (can) take part?
4. **How?** – What is the process, methods and tools you will use? How will you ensure that it has impact?

Below we outline some of the key considerations under each of these questions. Check out the next chapter for links to more detailed guidance on how to design public participation.

Why? – Defining your purpose

As with any project or programme, it is important to start by establishing your purpose. What is your reason for wanting to involve residents? What impact are you looking to achieve? Your answers to these questions should shape everything else that you decide, from who you seek to involve, to how you try to engage them.

One way to think about your purpose is to consider what you need people to help you to do. For example, you might be looking to the public to help propose ideas for tackling an issue; weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different courses of action; review and improve your plans; take action or something else entirely.

The flipside of this, of course, is considering what you can help them to do. Particularly when considering community mobilisation and mutual-aid groups, it will be important to consider how your purposes overlap and what opportunities there are for collaboration.

Find out more about [defining your purpose](#).

Once you've defined your purpose, the next step is to break this down into the specific outcomes that you are looking to achieve. It can be useful to differentiate between

primary (essential) and secondary (nice-to-have) outcomes when you do this to ensure focus on what really matters.

Find out more about [defining your outcomes](#).

Where? – Considering your context

Once you've established your purpose, you will need to consider how your context impacts it. Off-the-shelf or copy-and-paste processes rarely work, and can risk being damaging. Any good participatory process needs to be well embedded within its context – and designed with this in mind.

Your context will consist of a combination of internal factors – that concern your organisation – and external factors – that concern the local place, community and beyond.

Important internal factors to consider include your:

- Decision-making environment, including the interest, commitment and/or involvement of key decision-makers in the process, and how this process fits into the relevant decision-making systems;
- Capacity, capabilities and budgets to resource the process;
- History of engagement with the community and current relationship.

External factors to consider include:

- What engagement and mobilisation is already taking place in the local community;
- What other partners in the public, private and community sectors are doing or have planned, and opportunities for partnership or risks of conflict;
- Networks and assets that you can draw on to support the process;
- Barriers that might prevent residents from engaging.

One significant factor to consider currently is the impact of Covid on the operation and feasibility of different participatory methods. Social distancing and lockdown measures will likely mean that many face-to-face participation methods are not viable. Fortunately, there are lots of alternatives that can be employed instead.

Find out more about [considering your context](#).

Who? – Identifying your participants

It is important to consider who you need to involve in a participation process. This should be guided, to a large extent, by your purpose. For example, your specific purposes might dictate that you need to engage a specific group or community, a representative cross-section of society, or anyone who's interested and/or has

something to offer. As part of this process, it is also important to consider who you need to involve from within your own or partner organisations in order to ensure that the process has maximum chance of success.

Specific questions can help to make sure no important sectors are forgotten if the purpose is to be achieved. For example:

- Who is directly responsible for the decisions on the issues?
- Who is influential in the area, community and/or organisation?
- Who will be affected by any decisions on the issue (individuals and organisations)?
- Who runs organisations with relevant interests?
- Who is influential on this issue?
- Who can obstruct a decision if not involved?
- Who has been involved in this issue in the past?
- Who has not been involved, but should have been?

Once you have identified who you need to participate, the next step is to consider how best to reach them and facilitate their engagement. In order to do this, you will need to consider:

- What's-In-It-For-Them – what will participants get out of taking part and how does it connect with what they care about?
- Barriers – what will get in the way of people engaging and how can these factors be lessened and removed?
- Networks – what connections can you draw on to reach specific communities?
- Power – how will societal power imbalances and inequalities impact on if/how people can engage?

Find out more about [identifying your participants](#).

How? – Designing your process

Once you have considered all of the above, the final step is to design your process. This includes selecting the most appropriate methods and tools to achieve your purpose, in your context, with your participants.

It can often be advantageous to involve other people in designing your process. This may include other key stakeholders in your or partner organisations, and/or members of the local community themselves. This can have a dual benefit of contributing more ideas and perspectives to the design process, and building in ownership with key people.

As part of this design process, you will want to consider how you break down the process to deliver the specific outputs that contribute towards your purpose, and how

these activities are phased (particularly if there are dependencies between them). One way to consider this is by the policy making cycle, where different participatory methods may contribute at different stages. For example, you may have a process that involves people in each or a selection of these steps:

- **Agenda setting** – setting a vision and/or agreeing shared objectives;
- **Policy development** – developing and/or evaluating ideas and options;
- **Decision-making** – deciding on a course of action;
- **Implementation** – putting into practice projects and programmes;
- **Evaluation** – monitoring and evaluating what's been delivered.

Find out more about designing your process.

There are many tried-and-tested participatory methods and tools, as well as new innovations that are being experimented with, that can be used to involve people in a range of different ways.

No single method provides a silver bullet. They each have their own strengths and weaknesses, and are therefore more or less suited to different purposes, contexts and participants. It is therefore important to select them carefully with these things in mind.

Find out more about different participatory methods.

With social distancing measures in place, it is likely that you will need to particularly consider online methods and tools. Fortunately the web is filled with tools to enable participation, collaboration and discussion. They come in many shapes and sizes and fulfil a range of functions, but – as with methods – no tool can do everything.

Find out more about different digital tools for participation.

05. Helpful resources

There are lots of resources available that provide guidance on working with residents and local communities. Below we have collected some examples to help get you started. They are organised into four categories:

- Covid, communities and local government
- Designing public participation
- Community engagement
- Participatory methods and tools

Covid, communities and local government

COVID-19 recovery communications | Local Government Association

This resource from the LGA provides guidance for local authorities on communicating with residents about the Covid recovery.

Access it

COVID-19: good council practice | Local Government Association

This database of case studies from the LGA gives examples of how local authorities are responding to Covid across their many different areas of policy and responsibility.

Access it

Revisiting the Route Map to an Enabling State: Guiding Principles for Recovery | Carnegie UK Trust

This resource by the Carnegie UK Trust explores the relationship between government, public services and citizens and updates their 2014 "Route Map to an Enabling State" with some guiding principles for recovery.

Access it

How is COVID-19 changing the relationship between communities and public services? | New Local Government Network

This report by NLGN looks at how the relationship between communities and public services changed during the pandemic and gives pointers on how to ensure progress continues in the future.

Access it

Communities vs. Coronavirus: The rise of mutual aid

This report by NLGN explores how mutual aid groups have emerged in response to Covid and gives recommendations to local authorities on how to work with them.

Access it

Designing public participation

How do I plan a participatory process? | Involve

This knowledge base resource from Involve gives a step-by-step guide to planning participatory processes.

Access it

How to design and plan public engagement processes: A handbook | What Works Scotland

This handbook by What Works Scotland includes detailed guidance on designing and planning effective engagement processes.

Access it

Community engagement

Community mobilisation: Unlocking the potential of community power | NLGN

This report from NLGN provides a how-to guide for building active, networked and powerful communities.

Access it

Participatory methods and tools

Methods | Participedia

Participedia is a crowdsourced platform for methods and case studies on public participation and democratic innovation. It includes a collection of over 300 methods that have been used around the world. Participedia is building a specific "Citizens Voices and Values on Covid-19" collection

Access it

Methods Toolkit | Involve

The methods toolkit by Involve outlines over 50 different participatory and deliberative methods, including what they are, when they should be used, their strengths and weaknesses and what they cost.

Access it

Digital Tools Database | Involve

The digital tools database by Involve includes a range of online tools to enable participation, collaboration and discussion.

Access it

Civic Tech Field Guide

The Civic Tech Field Guide, by Crowd Hall, is a crowdsourced, global collection of civic tech tools and projects.

Access it

06. Where it's happening

Some places are already taking steps to engage people in taking decisions and action around Covid.

Here are a few examples that we have come across.

Citizens' Panel on the Covid Recovery | West Midland Combined Authority

The West Midlands Combined Authority ran a Citizens' Panel to guide its Covid recovery. The panel consisted of 36 residents from across the region and a range of backgrounds, who met online throughout the summer to learn about the issues facing the region and share experiences of how the pandemic has affected them and their families. The panel agreed six priorities:

- Getting back to normal, safely – ensuring people can live safely and there is clear guidance as we move out of lockdown and to avoid a second peak.
- Healthcare – making sure that patients can be treated, avoiding risk of Covid-19, and the healthcare system gets back on track to diagnose and treat people when they need it. It also means promoting healthy living to reduce demand for the NHS in the long-term.
- Mental Health – specific emphasis on making sure that anyone who needs mental health support knows where to find it and is guided to access support.
- Education – preparing children to go back to an adapted school environment, ensuring their safety and wellbeing. Making sure that every child is supported to make up for lost time so children from all backgrounds are equally able to achieve their goals.
- Employment – creating new jobs, with an emphasis on apprenticeships and entry-level jobs. Making sure that additional training is provided to give people the right skill sets to enter the workforce and getting people who have lost their jobs for Covid-related reasons back into work.
- Promoting and supporting business – especially smaller and/or local businesses and the self-employed for example by encouraging people to buy local. Providing financial and business support to help them get back on their feet and protect jobs.

Find out more

Coronavirus (COVID-19): framework for decision making | Scottish Government

The Scottish Government ran a rapid public engagement process to get input from the public on its decision-making process for Covid for managing lockdown arrangements. As part of this, the government set up a crowdsourcing platform for people to add ideas and comments to inform its approach. Over the course of less than a week, the platform collected 4,122 ideas and 17,966 comments.

[Find out more](#)

Citizens' Assembly on the Covid Recovery | Bristol City Council

Bristol City Council has adopted a multi-stage participatory and deliberative process to rebuild a more resilient, fair and sustainable city and understand how Covid-19 has affected its residents and how the city should respond. The Council sees this as an opportunity to confront and address the inequalities that existed before the pandemic and which may be further entrenched. A specific aim is to ensure engagement with those who are often unheard and underrepresented in decision making.

The engagement process has three phases:

1. Focus groups: To hear from a broad spectrum of people in detail about how coronavirus and lockdown had impacted them. This information was then used to shape the topics covered in the survey.

2. Survey: The [Your City Our Future survey](#) was launched at the beginning of August with the aim of hearing from 5,000 citizens. The topics covered are broad and include how people feel about working from home, as well as changes in travel behaviour, income and job opportunities for example. Crucially, by tracking responses from different communities, the Council is able to target certain groups to ensure it hears from the full diversity of the city.

3. Citizens' Assembly: Based on the work outlined above, the Council will identify the issues that are both important to people but which also divide opinion. This will then be brought to a citizens' assembly of one hundred Bristolians, or up to three smaller citizens' juries depending on the breadth of issues raised through the survey. Using evidence, and through debate, participants will produce recommendations for the council and other city partners to consider.

This work is feeding into Bristol's recovery plan, which is being developed alongside the assembly as part of an iterative process, allowing for the incorporation of the outputs of engagement with citizens. The plan is a collaborative piece of work, bringing together city stakeholders from all sectors around a shared vision for Bristol

post-Covid. Outputs of the engagement will also be used to inform the annual refresh of the Council's One City Plan, laying out our vision for Bristol to 2050.[1]

[Find out more](#)

Find more examples

Participedia collection: Citizens Voices & Values on Covid-19

Participedia is building a collection of projects and resources from around the world on deliberative public engagement processes that explore citizens' thoughts and values on trade-offs among health, privacy, and economic concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Access them here](#)

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[1] This explanation of the process is taken from the blog "[Using Deliberative Democracy to Build Back Better in Bristol](#)", part of the [A Democratic Response to Covid-19 project](#).

07. What it could look like

There are a wide variety of ways that local authorities can work with their communities to address the different issues, challenges and opportunities that have arisen out of Covid.

This chapter outlines a range of example processes to provide some inspiration for what it could look like. As outlined in chapter 3, it is important that these are not treated as off-the-shelf solutions – any process needs to be tailored to the local context – but we hope they provide some helpful ideas.

The illustrative processes presented in this chapter have been developed by members of Deliberative Democracy Practitioners' Network during and following an online workshop held in August 2020. They cover the following challenges / questions:

1. How can we support those suffering from isolation and/or poor mental health as a result of Covid-19?
2. How can we direct funding towards and between mutual aid groups in an open and participatory way?
3. What should be the priorities for the Covid-19 recovery?
4. What is the future for mobility, transport and active travel in our community?
5. How can we support digitally excluded members of the community to continue to go about their day-to-day lives?

Example 1: How can we support those suffering from isolation and/or poor mental health as a result of Covid-19?

Purpose

The purpose of this process would be to involve people experiencing isolation and/or poor mental health, and the wider community, in identifying and developing the support they need.

People

Who would be invited?

✓ Open invitation   ⬜ Specific communities
✓ People with lived experience   ⬜ Representative sample

This process would seek to involve people with lived experience (or experience through family and friends) to help to develop effective responses

Process

The process would have three stages, in order to understand people's experience of social isolation and mental ill health, develop ideas for how it can be addressed, and facilitate collaborative responses:

Phase 1: Experience collection

The process would start by collecting the experiences of residents of social isolation and mental ill health during Covid-19. It would seek to understand what the impact has been in different communities and how people have responded. A range of methods could be used to do this. A quick online survey to collect people's experience could be set up and promoted via council communication channels and local groups and organisations who have links to different communities. Individual interviews or focus groups of people with lived experience could be brought together via video-conferencing – or socially distanced in groups of less than six in an outside location – to discuss their experience.

Phase 2: Ideas generation

The second stage would be an open call for ideas to help to address the issues that have been identified. An online crowdsourcing tool[2] could be used to collect these ideas and allow others to engage with them. Again, the council would need to reach out via its communication channels and partners to encourage ideas to be submitted. Ideas may also have been generated through Phase 1.

Phase 3: Collaborative planning

The final step could be to bring together stakeholders from relevant public, voluntary and community, and business organisations, along with residents with lived experience, to develop collaborative solutions. This could take place through a series of facilitated video-conferencing meetings, with plenary and breakout discussions. Residents with lived experience would be supported before, during and after the meetings to take part.

A challenge fund could also be established, where local groups and businesses are invited to put forward proposals for helping to address the issue. This could be linked with a participatory budgeting approach, where people with lived experience of social isolation and mental ill health are involved in deciding which get funded.

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[2] See the digital tools database for examples: https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base/where-do-i-start-digital-engagement/digital-tools-database

Example 2: Participatory Grant-Making: How can we direct funding towards and between mutual aid groups in an open and participatory way?

Purpose

This process would have a number of purposes:

- Distributing resources towards those providing mutual aid services;
- Avoiding unhealthy competition between groups for resources;
- Building grassroots responses based on lived experience;
- Reducing social isolation and building social capital;
- Communicating about and involving citizens in budget-setting;
- Involving residents in wider conversations on resource allocation

People

Who would be invited?

☐ Open invitation   ✓ Specific communities
☐ People with lived experience   ☐ Representative sample

This process would seek to foster new or stronger mutual aid projects by engaging people with lived experience (or experience through family and friends) with ideas, energy and/or resources. At different points in the process the participants might be already connected to informal or structured community based groups or individual local residents. The process can be run face-to-face, online or through a blended approach.

Process

Phase one: Ideas Generation/capacity building
Once a budget is identified and a steering group has been formed a community stakeholder meeting within the area is held to co-design the process. This enables community oversight and wider outreach to those who would not normally apply for funds. This stakeholder meeting co-designs the key elements of the process. A call for ideas is then launched, using a simple paper or online application process. Rules vary by context and community. Capacity building workshops may be held to help people develop strong proposals.

Phase two: Shortlisting/refinement
After initial proposals have been gathered a process of sense-checking and refinement takes place. A public workshop where ideas are discussed may be held. The idea is not to rule out proposals but to refine them to ensure they meet any

criteria agreed within phase one, are achievable, and do not duplicate or conflict with other proposals. A final list of projects that could be funded is agreed.

Phase three: Public Voting

Through a well publicised and open process, all the agreed projects are considered and prioritised by any local resident who wishes to take part. Criteria of who can vote (by age, residency, lived experience etc) agreed in earlier phases, and a voting method (generally multiple ranked voting) is used to select which projects are funded. This happens in order of the most popular first, until the available funding is fully allocated. Funds are then transferred to those making the proposal, or where they are an informal group, to a sponsoring body.

Phase Four: Celebrating/evaluating

An evaluation process to monitor spending and report outcomes should have been agreed within phase one and two. This should be proportionate to the scale of funding and ideally overseen by those involved in co-designing the process. A public celebration or feedback event is typically held some time after the public voting to share what has been achieved and potentially launch a new round of grant-making. A clear communication strategy throughout the process alongside 'word of mouth' of participants raises the profile of community based catalysts and activists.

Phase Five: Amplifying/scaling

Once trust in the process is developed, through repeated rounds of participatory grant-making the scale of the budget and the breadth of participation can be increased. In many cases the participatory budgeting (PB) grant-making process can also be used to engage residents in wider conversations on the shape of public services. This process is sometimes called mainstreaming. To foster transparency over budget allocations and local accountability over the shape of public services those activated by the grant making process can be invited to propose or prioritise the investments or responses provided by agencies working within their community.

Further information

- Guidelines for participatory grant-making:
  https://sharedfuturecic.org.uk/report/grant-making-through-participatory-budgeting-a-how-to-guide/
- Global Participatory Budgeting Atlas, reviewing similar approaches taken at scale worldwide:
  https://pbnetwork.org.uk/pb-world-atlas-list-over-11000-participatory-budgeting-experiences/
- Blog on developing voice and agency and for reducing social isolation through this approach:

https://sharedfuturecic.org.uk/our-voice-is-being-heard-at-last-building-social-inclusion-through-participatory-budgeting/

Example 3: What should be the priorities for the Covid recovery?

Purpose

The purpose of this process would be to involve the local community in defining the priorities for how the area recovers from Covid-19. It will provide the local authority with the community's hopes and fears for the future and recommendations on how to build back better.

People

Who would be invited?

✓ Open invitation   ⬜ Specific communities
⬜ People with lived experience   ✓ Representative sample

This process would combine an open call for local residents to submit their hopes and priorities for the future, with a representative group to hear evidence, balance different points of view and make recommendations

Process

The process would have two stages – starting with an open call for views and ending with a deliberative panel:

Phase 1: Open call for views

The process would start by collecting views from the local community on their hopes and priorities for the future. This would provide an opportunity for anyone in the local community to offer their experience and perspective. It would provide a source of information that could inform the council's immediate decision-making, as well as a basis of evidence and opinion for the deliberative panel to consider.

There are a variety of online tools that could be used to collect this input from the local community, some of which may already be in use by the council. One option would be to use an argument visualisation tool called pol.is, which enables people to give their view and respond to others in a way that builds a map of opinion on the issue. This can help to identify areas of consensus and disagreement in a much more nuanced way than other online tools. Alternatively, other ideas generation and/or discussion tools could be used to collect input and allow some discussion.

The participatory process would need to be coupled with a communications campaign, led by the council, to encourage people to respond. We would suggest

reaching out through local community and business groups, as well as using social media, newsletters and other networks at the councils disposal to reach out.

Phase 2: Deliberative panel

The deliberative panel would hear evidence – including the views of the wider community – and make recommendations to the council. It would consist of 20 to 30 residents selected by lottery[3] to be reflective of the local community.

The deliberative panel – in common with other deliberative processes – would go through a three step process of:

- learning – participants learn from each other and external informants and advocates. In addition, written and visual materials may be shared with participants during the process;

- deliberation – participants carefully consider what they have learnt, considering the perspectives of others and begin to consider the hard choices and trade-offs that must be made; and

- decision-making – participants develop recommendations and/or make decisions.

It would use a combination of online video-conferencing, discussion forums, co-drafting and voting tools to complete its work.

Further information

See the examples in the previous chapter from the West Midlands and Bristol.

Example 4: What is the future for mobility, transport and active travel in our community?

Purpose

Covid-19 has meant that how people get around an area has changed. There are different needs and expectations from transport. There is a tension between active travel and growing use of the car as people move away from buses during Covid.

The process will explore a vision for a town / city and how that might be realised in order to help the local authority implement mobility improvements.

It will engage with the range of residents and ensure that the voices that are often not heard are included in the dialogue.

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[3] See MASS LBPs guide to running a civic lottery: https://www.masslbp.com/civic-lottery-guide

People

Who would be invited?

✓ Open invitation   ✓ Specific communities
✓ People with lived experience   ✓ Representative sample

Through different phases the process will engage with different groups to learn from experiences, hear from representative views and work with stakeholders to work through tensions.

Process

Phase 1: Gathering experiences

There would be local promotion of an invitation from the local authority encouraging residents to share their views and experiences of moving around their area, as well as their aspirations for the future.

These will be logged on an online portal coupled with paper-based options and building on communication channels people have been using in lockdown (e.g mutual aid whatsapp groups, community facebook sites etc)

- Questions might focus on experiences, but also on hopes for a new town, fears / concerns that need to be addressed (a collective analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)

This could also take the form of a "community review" where the community are actively asked for their opinions to take to the deliberative process.

A diverse stakeholder oversight group will be established, acknowledging that there will be many players in the solutions that need to be engaged from the outset. As the process develops this group may also be the group that monitors progress or commissions separate sub-groups to work through tricky issues.

Phase 2: Deliberative mini public
A deliberative mini public (see, e.g., the Toronto planning panel) will be recruited to review the issues and trade-offs facing the town/city and develop a vision. There could be a range of options for this phase:

- Citizens' jury / assembly
- A standing / rotating panel of residents

Phase 3: Collaborative working groups
Whilst there will be recommendations from Phase 2 it is likely that it also reveals issues that require further in-depth participation and dialogue with specific communities or stakeholders. This phase will set up collaborative working groups to

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resolve particular issues, such as how to meet the needs of local traders for deliveries in pedestrianised areas or plan for last-mile delivery that works for local traders.

Further information

Relevant experience/examples: [Toronto Planning Review Panel](#)

Example 5: How can we support digitally excluded members of the community to continue to go about their day-to-day lives?

Purpose

Services are going digital by default to protect health, but this excludes people. This process would gain understanding of the barriers and how to best include those who are excluded.

People

Who would be invited?

- ☒ Open invitation
- ☒ People with lived experience
- ✓ Specific communities
- ✓ Representative sample

Part of the process is about identifying who is impacted - need representative sample, people might not identify themselves as digitally excluded
Demographically representative sample selected first, snowballing to gain greater knowledge through community networks to target specific communities

Process

This process would adopt a double diamond approach to innovation:[4]

Step 1

Tell us about your day-to-day lives, how it has been impacted by lockdown and things reopening? – could do this ahead of time, what did you used to do, what do you do now?

Step 2

What has been the impact on day-to-day activities going online, who have you seen that has been excluded by 'digital by default', what can you / others no longer do?

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[4] See the Design Council's explanation of the double diamond:
https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/what-framework-innovation-design-councils-evolved-double-diamond

Step 3

What are the barriers and how do we get to the root causes? Why are people excluded? - bring in specific community groups identified in step 2

Step 4

What are the potential solutions to overcoming the barriers, solution routes rather than direct solutions - who is best placed to inform those solutions

08. Further reading

Here are some links to interesting further reading on Covid, public participation and democracy:

- A democratic response to Covid-19 | Involve and the Centre for the Study of Democracy, University of Westminster
  https://www.involve.org.uk/our-work/our-projects/guidance/what-role-should-public-play-covid-19-recovery
- Beyond the crisis: How might local government build a positive legacy after Covid? | Eddie Copeland
  https://medium.com/loti/beyond-the-crisis-how-local-government-can-build-a-positive-legacy-after-covid-3ac6e3d32a24
- COVID-19 and the basics of democratic governance | Nuffield Council on Bioethics
  https://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/news/statement-covid-19-and-the-basics-of-democratic-governance
- How can local authorities step into a Citizen future? | Jon Alexander, New Citizenship Project
  https://medium.com/new-citizenship-project/how-can-local-authorities-step-into-a-citizen-future-ed4670bfed84
- The Covid-19 pandemic has exposed why we urgently need to re-imagine democracy | Clodagh Harris and Ian Hughes, Democratic Audit
  https://www.democraticaudit.com/2020/06/18/the-covid-19-pandemic-has-exposed-why-we-urgently-need-to-re-imagine-democracy
- Covid-19 – a social phenomenon requiring diverse expertise | MacGregor et al, Institute for Development Studies
  https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/covid-19-a-social-phenomenon-requiring-diverse-expertise