

Effective Interventions Unit

EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT: A GUIDE TO PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

WHAT IS IN THIS GUIDE?

This guide examines the principles and practice of community engagement, with particular reference to the drugs misuse field. The guide includes a description of specific techniques and their relative strengths and weaknesses.

WHAT IS THE AIM?

To provide information and evidence to support community engagement in Scotland, with a focus on the needs of the Drug Action Teams (DATs), their associated agencies and the communities that they serve.

WHO SHOULD READ IT?

Anyone involved in developing, designing, implementing or evaluating community engagement activities.

WHO CONDUCTED THE RESEARCH?

Patricia Russell, Anita Morrison and Paul Davidson of the Effective Interventions Unit (EIU) conducted the literature review and compiled this report. The Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) conducted a survey of DATs and community groups to inform this work. The EIU would also like to thank Clare Lardner of Clarity (www.clarity-scotland.co.uk; info@clarity-scotland.co.uk) for drawing together the examples of community engagement techniques set out in this report.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, new forms of community engagement have developed in Scotland and the wider United Kingdom. This is in recognition that organisations need to become more **accountable to the local communities that they serve**, and that all stakeholders should have a voice in decision-making, particularly at a local level. Further, if community engagement does not happen, people in communities may not see decisions about local policies and the delivery of services as legitimate and credible.

Experience shows that community engagement brings important benefits:

- resources are targeted more effectively
- services are better tailored to local needs
- people take greater responsibility for what is happening in their area
- more lasting and sustainable change takes place

As part of both its social justice and community planning agendas, the Scottish Executive is involved in a range of initiatives aimed at promoting community capacity building and community engagement in local decision-making. A partnership approach is at the heart of these initiatives, with the community as a key partner. For more information on some of these, please see www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/social/sjan-00.asp.

- Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs)
- Working for Communities pathfinder programme
- Better Neighbourhood Services Fund
- The Working Together, Learning Together Programme
- Introduction of People's Panels and Juries
- Best Value
- Community Planning
- Locality budgeting

One of the most difficult problems that can affect communities is **drug misuse**. The Scottish strategy '**Tackling Drugs in Scotland: Action in Partnership**' recognises that partnership between professionals, local people and businesses to develop local initiatives will be a crucial factor in tackling the problems arising from drug misuse. Whilst existing drug fora, facilitated by the Drug Action Teams (DATs), have provided a mechanism for some level of community involvement, the Scottish Executive is keen to promote creative approaches to community engagement among DATs and their partners to ensure that community views are taken fully into account in drugs work.

In September 2001 a **National Drug Conference** was held in Edinburgh. A wide range of participants attended the conference including the statutory and non-statutory sectors and the community. The focus of the conference was community engagement in the drug misuse field. This conference highlighted the importance of overcoming the sense of powerlessness communities often feel by developing good practice in community engagement. The DATs, by their very nature, will need to play a central role in the development of this work. A brief report of the conference will be available shortly which will outline how the issues raised are being addressed by the Executive and other agencies.

In response to the need for information on methods of community engagement, the Effective Interventions Unit (EIU) at the Scottish Executive was asked to draw together and **review existing knowledge** in this area for the Drug Action Teams, their associated agencies and the communities that they serve. The review focused on the interaction between DATS (and their associated agencies) and the communities they serve. This guide describes the main

findings of the review exercise and points the reader towards key publications and resources in community engagement.

METHODS

Two main exercises were conducted to inform this guide to community engagement. The focus of the guide is on engaging communities on issues arising from drug misuse. However, the methods addressed community engagement more broadly and this guide includes examples from out-with the drugs field.

1. Review of literature

The EIU team conducted a search of standard literature databases for published information on community engagement. This included literature on general concepts of community engagement as well as information on specific techniques for engaging the community. A number of relevant web-sites were also searched.

The identified literature has been largely (but not exclusively) published by government organisations and charitable organisations. The key publications and web-sites are presented in the reference and resource list at the back of this guide. Most of the relevant documents can be downloaded.

2. Survey of Drug Action Teams and Community Groups

The EIU commissioned the Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) to conduct a survey of Drug Action Teams (DATs) and community groups operating in the drug misuse field to gauge the current level and nature of community engagement, and to elicit views on the benefits and difficulties of engagement from both perspectives.

This survey was conducted between June and August 2001. Nineteen (out of 22) DATs and 14 community groups participated in the survey. The community groups represented a cross-section, with different aims and objectives, in both urban and rural settings.

The results of the survey are presented throughout this review document.

The EIU and the Scottish Drugs Forum would like to thank the representatives of Drug Action Teams and community groups who gave their time to participate in the survey. Thanks also go to those who provided further information on the examples used in this review.

CHAPTER 2: DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTS AND RATIONALE

DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

What is a Community?

Defining 'community' is not straightforward. **There is no single 'correct' definition. Community means different things to different people.** In this review, we have identified a number of possible ways to think about what constitutes a community;

- People living in the same geographical area
- People of the same age, gender or ethnicity
- Communities of interest (e.g. drug users' families)
- The wider public

It is also important to remember that most people are members of **more than one community** depending upon where they live, where they work, what their interests, hobbies, concerns and difficulties are and what services they use.

Clearly, communities are made up of **people** who will have a range of interests and views, knowledge and experience, fears and concerns. Communities will often come together when a problem or issue arises. For example, when there is a prospect of a local school closure. Such communities of interest may disband when they achieve their objectives.

However, communities who are united by a purpose - and this could apply to communities drawn together through drug misuse - may continue to grow and change in response to changing problems and challenges. Such communities often have a spokesperson or a '**champion**' who acts as a catalyst. It may, however, be important to establish whether this spokesperson represents the views of the whole community.

⓪ SDF SURVEY RESULTS ⓪

Characteristics of the founding member(s) or 'champions' of community groups in the SDF survey:

- Charismatic, local mothers with drive and enthusiasm, who may have been directly or indirectly affected by an emerging local drug problem or the death of a young person which is related to drugs
- Family members, especially parents, affected by drug use
- A local man, who although not directly affected by drugs, displayed a strong sense of civic duty towards his village
- Service users

Conversely, there are other communities where there is **no strong voice or 'champion'**, but who still need to be consulted and represented. In any community engagement exercise, it is important to ensure that all relevant groups are given the opportunity to contribute. Where service provision is the issue, it may also be important to give non-users an opportunity to make their opinions known. It is important to stress that community engagement **may not occur spontaneously**, particularly if agencies and partnerships are not accessible and approachable.

The **lack of a single definition** or description of community makes engagement more challenging. There is a clear need to be sure about the group or groups who should be targeted for engagement. The good practice literature suggests that careful consideration of the target community will lead to a higher quality of engagement.

Where there are groups within a community with **different and sometimes conflicting views** - and this may well be the case with drug issues - it will be even more important to

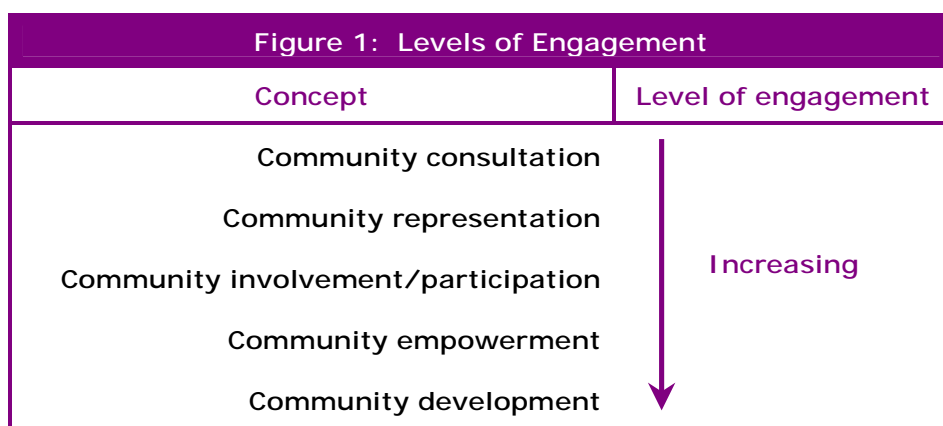
choose an appropriate method, or range of methods, to ensure that everyone has their say. In some cases, depending on the issue, it may be appropriate to give priority to the views of particular groups including carers and families or even drug users themselves.

① SDF SURVEY RESULTS ①

- Participating DATs highlighted the difficulty of defining or describing what constitutes their community.
- Similarly, community groups demonstrated the diverse range of ‘communities’ that have organised representative or lobbying groups (with a wide range of aims and objectives). These groups include family support groups, user groups, community safety partnerships and groups with little or no participation from users or their families.

What is engagement?

The subject of this guide is engagement between agencies and community groups. There are different ‘levels’ of community engagement. Two useful frameworks that can be used to think about the continuum between consultation and empowerment are Sherry Arnstein’s **Ladder of Participation** and South Lanarkshire Council’s **Wheel of Participation** (these can be viewed at www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/resfinds/hcc2-00asp). For illustration, a simple continuum is shown below in **Figure 1** below.



It is important to stress that **all levels of engagement have value**. There is no right or wrong method. It depends largely on the issue. Sometimes an issue can be dealt with quite satisfactorily by an agency carrying out a consultation exercise in the community. In other cases (particularly where issues are complex) there may be a need for a more proactive and participative approach from the community.

What is important is to select the right approach for the question posed and to do it well. Selecting the wrong approach, or carrying out the exercise badly, is ineffective and can be counterproductive. It is important to note that the community should also be involved at an earlier stage in prioritising issues for engagement.

The concepts at one end of the continuum in Figure 1 (**consultation, representation**) may simply involve the provision of information or community representatives’ attendance at meetings. However, these activities are sometimes regarded as tokenism, or (at worst) as rubberstamping exercises.

As the level of engagement increases (see **involvement and participation** in Figure 1), building partnerships with the community will be crucial in identifying problems and opportunities and formulating solutions. This may, for example, involve the community in

planning local policies. Specific techniques to facilitate this type of community engagement are set out in Chapter 5.

The more ambitious initiatives (**empowerment and development**) enable the community to create a vision of its own future and actively participating in making the vision happen. The aim is to improve the quality of life based on improved performance of community organisations and a shift in the power balance between service providers and service users. There are some good examples of how this has happened in Scotland. Agencies and partnerships need to be committed to empowerment before this can happen effectively.

❶ EXAMPLES ❶

- The Cranhill **Mothers Against Drugs** group have developed in the last few years from a campaigning group to a service provider in their area.
- **Signpost** (in the Forth Valley area) have developed from being a Family Support Group into a service provider. Signpost provides advice and information to families of drug users in their area.

RATIONALE

Why engage?

It is helpful to think about **why** organisations, on the one hand, and communities, on the other hand, should engage with each other. Recent research has identified a number of benefits of engagement (Scottish Executive CRU 2000; COSLA 1999).

For organisations, engagement:

- Informs policy-making at a local level.
- Informs service planning by identifying essential needs, priorities and potential problems.
- Improves targeting and effectiveness of services.
- Helps to measure how agencies and partnerships are performing.
- Highlights how an agency or partnership is perceived within the community.
- Identifies areas where further co-ordination between agencies may be desirable and can help identify which roles individual agencies should play.
- Establishes the agency or partnership as transparent and accountable (underpinning the principles of local democracy) and helps to build community ownership.

For the community, engagement:

- Involves those who might not normally be included through traditional routes, ensuring that everyone has a voice.
- Identifies the needs of the community, sets priorities for the future and shares control of the local agenda.
- Encourages greater acceptance of the responsibility that communities have towards identifying important issues in their communities and formulating effective solutions.

- Builds community spirit and co-operative working.
- Empowers individuals, ensuring they do not have to accept situations passively.

① SDF SURVEY RESULTS ①

DATs participating in the SDF survey emphasised the following benefits of community engagement:

- Creates a greater awareness of drug issues in the community
- Extends ownership of drug prevention to the community.
- Forges links with the community that go beyond drug issues (e.g. social deprivation).
- Communities start to look at what **they** can do, and take ownership.
- Provides an opportunity to integrate with other work in the community (e.g. community safety work).

Will engagement happen spontaneously?

Despite the strong rationale for community engagement, it is probably **unreasonable to expect that engagement will occur spontaneously** in most communities. Agencies and partnerships (such as DATs) need to create an environment in which they are **accessible and approachable** to community members (either individually or as groups). However, it may also be necessary and desirable to be more proactive in developing engagement. Techniques to help generate engagement are set out in Chapter 5.

Community groups will also have **to organise and co-ordinate their efforts** when engaging with agencies, partnerships and other community representatives. The literature highlights the need for training and support for community groups as essential for effective engagement. Agencies and partnerships may have to take responsibility for developing various types of training and support for community members to allow effective engagement.

CHAPTER 3: Principles of Effective Community Engagement

So what makes good community engagement?

The SDF Survey shows that both DATs (and their partner agencies) and community groups are **willing to engage** with each other. In our review we have identified a number of key principles that underpin effective community engagement and these are set out later in this chapter.

Most of the literature, however, is based on the role of **agencies as the instigators** of engagement. In practice this will often be the case, but there are a growing number of examples where the community has been proactive in engaging with local agencies. In those cases, the DAT or agency needs to be responsive, open and accessible. Above all, they have to be willing to listen.

When the issue is drug misuse, the spur for action is often the level of drug-related crime in an area or the death of a user. People in the community will, understandably, be angry and expect some immediate action. They may be frustrated by what they see as slowness and bureaucracy. This is a challenge for the agencies who will often be the subject of strong criticism, sometimes in the media.

At the **national drugs conference** in September 2001, the views and experiences of community groups showed that many had indeed been through a difficult period of challenging local agencies and frustration at the apparent lack of response. But they had moved beyond initial levels of poor communication by a combination of persistence, learning how the "system" works, and coming up with creative and constructive ideas. Over time community groups had built up good relationships with their DAT and local agencies who had offered information and support.

So, what should the community do to engage with local decision-makers in their areas?

The literature stresses the need for community groups to:

- **Set clear aims and objectives.** This will help to clarify which agencies and partnerships you need to engage with and help crystallise the purpose of the group.
- **Harness experience available in the community.** There will be other community groups who have experience of engagement and may be able to help.
- **Participate in available training and elicit support.** There may be opportunities for training in your local area, or support available from statutory and non-statutory agencies.

However, in the course of the national drugs conference and the interviews with community groups during the SDF survey, further key messages (often based on the groups' experiences) were elicited from community groups represented. These are set out in the box below.

What should the community do?

- Understand that both the community and the DAT share the same aim.
- Promote mutual understanding of the different roles and expertise that different agencies and community representatives bring
- Try to be professional.
- Be unthreatening and never blame agencies – then the barriers can be broken down.
- Add some passion to the process.
- Emphasise that quantitative information only tells part of the story. The qualitative information that community members can bring to the process may play a vital role in improving the understanding of an issue.
- Understand that drug services are part of the community, so everyone has a stake in success (including drug users). Complete rehabilitation means living successfully in the community.
- Evaluation (preferably independent) is vital to assess what a service can do and when to move people on.
- Keep the agencies accountable by asking questions and following up actions. Experts should be 'on tap', not 'on top'. But go to the top if need be.
- Use research and enlist the support of experts to get the dialogue going.
- Find people (either in other community groups or in agencies) who are credible to the community and can help access funding for services.
- Use the media and survive the bad publicity.

Key Principles

The key principles from the literature are set out below. These are grouped under three headings: **planning, commitment and inclusiveness**. While the emphasis in this section is on good practice for DATs and their associated agencies, many of these principles hold true for community groups attempting to engage with their local decision-makers.

Planning

- **Set clear aims and objectives** for engagement activities. It is vital to establish from the outset the community you want to engage, the issue to be engaged on and the plans for implementation and dissemination. When you have clarified your aims, you should be able to decide which approach, or range of approaches, will best meet those aims. Setting clear aims and objectives also allows evaluation of the engagement process.
- **Start small and start early** to allow adequate time for planning. For example, it may be useful to pilot an approach in an area before integrating it into an on-going strategy for community engagement.
- **Consider how to prioritise the views of one group over another**. Where you know that there are likely to be different groups with potentially conflicting views, think about

this at an early stage. This will help to structure the consultation, both in terms of when different groups are consulted and the resources allocated to each part of the process.

- **Make plans for giving feedback to individuals and communities at the outset** and tell people how it will be done. Consider what the most appropriate method for feedback is (e.g. meeting, letters, posters). Explain why decisions were made and, if recommendations have not been adopted, explain why not. Thank people for giving their views and demonstrate that you value their contributions.
- **Review and evaluate engagement strategies and approaches used.** To ensure that community engagement is as effective as possible it will be important to regularly review activities and (where possible) to evaluate the approaches and methods that are used.

Commitment

- **Secure commitment from all those involved.** The commitment of all stakeholders (including the community) will be essential for effective community engagement.
- **Community engagement should be, and should be seen to be, a core activity.** This means integrating community engagement into planning and management systems. It is likely that a range of methods and approaches will be required to cover the needs of the DAT and the communities they serve.
- **Tackle issues of real concern - get individuals and communities to help set issues for action.** It is important that any engagement exercise or strategy focuses on issues that are of genuine concern in the community. For example, it may be possible to build upon general community surveys or panel surveys by concentrating on particular issues of concern.
- **Be clear about the limitations of the overall strategy and each consultation activity.** If, for example, you wish to consult on a specific policy or planning issue, you should be open about any courses of action that will not be feasible, and why. This will avoid raising unrealistic expectations and subsequent frustration. You should make clear that some action may be long-term.
- **Avoid the risk of 'tokenism'** by agreeing early in the process how the contribution of individuals and communities will be used. Be clear about constraints e.g. resources, and any statutory or regulatory limitations, to the participants. Involve those who will make use of the outputs of the exercise at the beginning so that recommendations can be reviewed and implemented speedily.
- **Promote success.** Where an engagement strategy, or particular method has been successful in a community it is important to promote the success. It may be important to get the local media on board to help disseminate this information.

Inclusiveness

- **Be open, accessible and approachable.** If community members and community groups feel able to make contact and maintain contact with agencies and partnerships there will be more and better community engagement
- **Maximise the opportunities for participation by the community.** Simple things can make it easier for people to participate. For example, providing transportation and childcare costs, ensuring disabled access to venues and providing optional ways of

participating appropriate to an individual's level of ability and confidence. It is also important to consider the additional support that may be required for vulnerable groups.

- **Consider the most appropriate location and time for each engagement activity.** It is generally advisable to engage with people in a familiar or comfortable environment (perhaps their own home) or at a venue well known to them e.g. community centre or library. If you are trying to engage with people of working age it may be important to provide opportunities to participate in the evening or at weekends
- **Develop the skills and capacity of the community.** This may be achieved through training and other support to community representatives. This may also be supported by e.g. payment of expenses.
- **Give individuals or communities the opportunity to oversee the introduction of the agreed developments** or changes and involve them in the process of implementation.

CHAPTER 4: CURRENT PRACTICE

How do the DATs and their communities currently engage?

The SDF survey showed that there is no consistent approach among DATs or their communities to engagement. A number of key findings from the survey will be discussed in this chapter. The survey showed that:

- A range of methods and approaches have been used by DATs and communities
- There is variation in community representation on the DATs and Drug Fora
- There are a range of ways of recruiting community representatives
- There are difficulties in maintaining and sustaining community engagement
- There is rarely specific funding allocated for community engagement [although DAT support funding can be used for this purpose].

What methods have been used by DATs?

The DAT participants in the SDF survey identified a range of methods that had been used either by them, or by their partner agencies, to engage with the local community. The approaches used were broad-based, but rarely planned within a long-term strategy of community engagement. The box below illustrates the range of methods that DATs stated they had used to engage with their communities.

① SDF SURVEY RESULTS ①

Methods DATs have used to engage with their communities:

- Focus groups, seminars and conferences on specific issues
- Engaging with youth groups through youth cafes, youth fora
- Newsletters with information on activities, seeking feed-back and publishing contact numbers
- Surveys (e.g. school surveys)
- People's panels
- People's juries
- Community fairs
- DAT presentations to local community groups, school groups, parents' groups.
- Community representation on DAT or DAT forum
- Circulating the drug strategy and corporate action plans to community councils and neighbourhood/tenant associations for comment and offering discussions.

What do DATs think effective engagement is?

In the course of the survey, DATs were also asked about their views on the effectiveness of their engagement activities. Most highlighted the importance of a **clear plan** for providing information and raising awareness and engaging with the community to ensure an effective approach. **Linking drug issues to other related issues** (e.g. training and employment, housing) was also highlighted, largely for practical reasons.

Some DATs noted the importance of using a **range of methods** to maximise the participation within a local community. Some participants felt it was important to offer **incentives** for taking part in community consultation (e.g. prize draw) to maximise the response rate. Setting aside a **budget** for meeting rooms, catering, travel expenses, child care was considered crucial.

"...some people are prepared to attend open public meetings but not others – probably need to keep trying to find different ways of engaging with the community until we find the model that people prefer"

Community Representation on the DAT

The SDF survey showed that most DATs had community representation either on the DAT committee or on a DAT forum. Eight (42%) DATs reported that they have some form of community representation on the DAT itself. The nature of this community representation varied considerably. A further 3 (16%) had community representation on a DAT Sub-group. A further 7 (37%) had representation only on the Drug Forum. The remaining DAT had no community representation.

There were a number of ways in which DATs reported that they recruited community representatives.

🕒 SDF SURVEY RESULTS 🕒

Examples of how community representatives were recruited

Recruitment methods varied and included:

- Bringing the Chair of the Drugs Forum on to the DAT
- Recruitment of individuals through local knowledge
- Bringing in an elected councillor
- By organising community conferences
- By nominations through Social Inclusion Partnerships
- Bringing on representatives of family support groups

DATs also work through other partnerships to obtain views including SIPs, Community Safety Partnerships, and Community Health Action Partnerships.

Overall, the level of community input to Drug Forums was **variable**. In some areas the DAT had worked very hard to generate community involvement in the Forum and create a degree of dialogue between the DAT and the community. In other areas, the relationship between the Drug Forum and the DAT was much more distant. In some cases, community involvement came about as a result of pressure from community representatives to be involved.

🕒 SDF SURVEY RESULTS 🕒

Other issues raised on community representation on the DAT

- Individuals and groups who come to forums or discussions with a different agenda can disrupt that discussion.
- One community "representative" can offer only one community perspective.
- Maintaining motivation and enthusiasm can be difficult
- The need for good "facilitation" of discussion in case it turns into a "greeting meeting"
- Raising false expectations that cannot or will not be met quickly, if at all.
- The need to support members of the community to understand the complexities of drug misuse and to participate fully in a range of forums.

Difficulties of Sustaining Community Engagement

There are of course challenges and difficulties to be faced in **sustaining community engagement** activity in the longer-term. As part of the SDF survey, DATs were asked to highlight difficulties in sustaining this type of activity. There were a number of reasons why they felt that community engagement was difficult to achieve and sustain.

ⓘ SDF SURVEY RESULTS ⓘ

Reasons why community engagement is difficult to sustain

- Lack of interest from the community compounded by a low level of communication, information and publicity about the DAT and its activities
- Community members may find the Drugs Forum too structured and formal
- Difficulties experienced (or perceived) by the DAT in resolving differences of opinions and views between community members
- Lack of resources on the part of community groups to take forward community action
- Some people in the community may be reluctant to raise their profile because drug misuse is a sensitive issue (and often hidden)
- Particular problems for remote communities

How Have Community Groups Developed and Responded?

Most of the groups interviewed in the SDF Survey have emerged over the last 2 to 3 years, although one group has been operating since 1984. There appears to be **contrasting approaches** in how they define their response to drugs issues. Some community groups have focused entirely on the drug issue; others have addressed the drug issue as part of a wider set of problems.

The varying responses appear to have had an impact on how the groups have **structured** themselves. Community groups include Family Support Groups, User Groups, Community Safety Partnerships, Forum of smaller community groups and groups with little or no input from carers or service users.

The different aims and the range of structures highlights the difficulty that community groups as well as DATs face in reaching an agreed and comprehensive definition or description of **what constitutes a community**. This raises the question of how to translate differing community perspectives and responses into an effective community engagement strategy.

How do community groups view the DAT and partner agencies?

Some groups viewed their **local DAT** as remote, not supportive and not fully understanding of how the group operated. One group claimed that, despite receiving DAT visits over the years, very little had changed. However, some groups felt supported by their DAT. A key factor in the relationship between community groups and DATs appears to be whether or not there was a good working relationship between the community group and the local DAT Co-ordinator or Drug Development Officer.

One group stated that they had a good working relationship with the **local Regeneration Project** and had been successful in a funding bid for a throughcare project that will be managed by the local community drug team. In another example, two groups that had been involved in campaigning and had attracted media coverage had been successful in engaging with, and receiving funding from, their local Social Inclusion Partnerships.

Some community groups had received a range of support from their **Local Authorities**. One group was provided with premises at a peppercorn rent and community education staff

provided training to local mothers, enhancing their group work skills for working with young people. One group had contacted the local housing office to set up a dialogue because they didn't want "difficult to let" flats in the village to become a "dumping ground".

Drug services had offered a range of support to community groups including the offer of a voluntary worker (one day a week), presentations on drugs awareness with local teenagers, administrative support, help with their constitution, organisational/managerial support and co-ordination of training on a range of issues. One group, however, perceived their local voluntary drug agency as unhelpful and not interested in community concerns. Overall, drug services, especially those in the voluntary sector, were seen to be supportive of community groups and their activities.

The police offered a range of support including provision of resources (for example T-shirts, "goody-packs"), meetings to outline how police teams work (including the drug squad) and inputs on drugs awareness from Community Safety Officers. Overall, community groups were positive about the support they received from the police.

Community groups in the survey frequently mentioned the support that they had received from other community groups at local, national and UK level. There appears to be the development of loose, mutual support, networks at a local, national and UK level. One group had received training and support from a Liverpool-based group to set up a helpline. Another group, which has rapidly expanded, has established contact with a range of other groups, offering advice, support and sharing their experience and skills with newly established groups.

A range of **other support** had been received from: -

- Scottish Business in the Community - business plan support, printing leaflets and administrative support
- Local Council of Voluntary Services - general funding support and information
- Politicians - some groups pointed out that they had sought support and guidance from a range of politicians (Councillors, MPs, MSPs, including Scottish Executive Ministers).

One group expressed **concerns** about the motivation behind support from professional organisations: i.e. they were concerned that the motivation was to serve professional interests rather than the community groups.

How can engagement be improved?

The survey highlighted a willingness and commitment from both DAT participants and community groups to engage more actively. The survey identified some key areas which DATs and community groups thought (if addressed) would help to achieve this greater level of engagement.

- The **steep learning curve for community groups can be made easier** if DATs and other agencies offer support, advice and information (e.g. on the roles of statutory agencies, fundraising)
- The **roles and remits** of potential stakeholders agencies, partnerships and the wider community should be clarified.
- The need to have **recognised arrangements for reimbursing community representatives' expenses** (e.g. transport, childcare)
- Greater effort in finding ways of **harnessing the range of views** that may exist in a community
- The scope for **establishing local and national support networks**

CHAPTER 5: METHODS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A **broad spectrum of techniques** can be used to engage with communities. Traditional techniques include household surveys, focus groups and public meetings. However, consultation and research techniques have broadened to include more participative and interactive methods.

Some of these techniques are designed just to elicit views, while others aim to empower the local community in decision making. The challenge for agencies lies in **assessing which method is most appropriate** for specific types of issue. Twelve techniques are set out in the following pages. A summary of techniques is presented in Appendix 2.

A number of key factors will influence the choice of method. In particular, it will be important to agree the following before deciding which technique to use:

- **The type of question** – Is the question to be addressed pre-defined or is there an open agenda? For example, it may be that you want to know what the community think could be done to improve the quality of life of people living with drugs. Or it may be more specific – what do the community think about the proposed location of a new needle exchange facility?
- **Quantitative or qualitative information** – What type of information is required? Some of the techniques will collect predominantly quantitative information (e.g. on numbers of people with certain attitudes) other collect predominantly qualitative information (e.g. detailed information on people's experiences).
- **The community to be engaged** – Who are the community to be engaged? It may be people who come from the same area, people with specific characteristics (e.g. young people, ethnic minority groups), a community of interest (e.g. user groups or users families) or the wider general public.
- **One-off or continuous engagement** – Is the exercise a snapshot, or is the aim of the engagement exercise to elicit continual engagement? Some techniques are snapshot exercises, but can be used repeatedly. Others are designed for more continuous engagement.
- **The available resources** – How much can you afford to spend on community engagement? As broad guidance each example has an approximate cost. This varies from less than £5,000 to more than £10,000 depending upon the technique.

KEY TO EXAMPLES

Issues

- A** = **Not pre-defined**, an open agenda
B = **Pre-defined**, focused issue, seek in-depth views
C = **Pre-defined**, specific issues, highly structured
D = **Combination**, or developed from open agenda

Cost bandings

- H** = **High** (more than £10,000)
M = **Medium** (between £5,000 and £10,000)
L = **Low** (less than £5,000)
For guidance only. Cost depends on size of project.

Communities

- 1** = **Location and/or geographical area** – people who have a location or geographical area in common,
2 = **Age/gender/ethnicity** – people who share one of these physical attributes e.g. young people, women, black and ethnic minority groups
3 = **Communities of interest** – groups who have an interest in common, which may be short or long term issue, for example campaign groups, user groups, parents groups.
4 = **Socially excluded groups** – people who, because of their circumstances, may be excluded from the opportunities available to others, e.g. drug users, young offenders, looked after children.
5 = **The general public** – the wider community of people who may have disparate interests, attributes, circumstances and locations.

1. OPEN SPACE

Description

Open Space allows participants to set the agenda in a bottom-up process of creative problem-solving. It usually consists of an event, over one to three days, in which all participants are considered to be equal and able to break free of inhibitions created by status and structures. It can be used with community groups in local settings or large numbers of people at a specially convened event. Participants start off in a circle and are given pieces of paper on which they write the issues they are concerned about and are willing to work on by convening or contributing to a workshop. All issues are placed on a large matrix and participants sign up for workshops to discuss and agree action. In practice, dominant themes emerge which are relevant to the community issues of the day. Workshops are written up and reported back to a plenary session held in a circle.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
A	One-off	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	L

Materials/resources required

- Facilitator/s experienced in the technique
- Flip chart
- Post-its
- Suitable size and quality of venue
- Catering
- Wall chart

Strengths

- wide variety of issues can be addressed
- allows bottom-up agenda to emerge
- new alliances can be formed across former social barriers
- participants have equal opportunity to be heard

Weaknesses

- focusing on action, rather than issues, may be difficult
- may not be representative

Example

The *Men and Health Development Group* of the Glasgow Healthy City Partnership held an Open Space event at Parkhead in 2000 on the topic of men's health. It was attended by 135 people including stakeholders from the health service, central and local government, schools, universities, colleges, trade unions, community organisations, the media, the private sector, the police and men themselves. All delegates had only first name badges to promote equity. Twenty issues were raised in the morning sessions and a corresponding 44 actions and priorities in the afternoons sessions. Voting on the 44 actions and priorities resulted in a set of priorities which has since been incorporated into a strategy for men's health.

References and websites

"What can we do about men's health", Health promotion, NHS Greater Glasgow, 2000

Also see www.openfutures.com

2. PLANNING FOR REAL

Description

A process of community consultation which involves building a 3-dimensional model of an area and holding a consultation event. At the event around 300 option cards are placed round the model and participants place cards on the model to show what they want and where they want it. There are also blank cards for people to write their own suggestions. Following this, using smaller group sessions all the options placed on the model are prioritised into Now, Soon or Later. These are then developed into an action plan. Planning for Real is a trademarked technique and facilitators using the technique must have written permission from the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
A	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M

Materials/resources required

- Suitable venue and catering
- Registered facilitator
- Large scale model (typically 16x8 feet) - model building is often done by a local school
- 1:300 map of area, usually available from local planning service
- Publicity
- Staff time for preparation

Strengths

- large numbers of people can take part (no finite number)
- inclusive - all sections of the community can take part
- discussion of a large number of topics is permitted
- starts with an open agenda
- fun, simple and easy to understand
- non-confrontational and informal
- particularly appropriate for geographical/physical issues, e.g. environment, planning

Weaknesses

- can take a lot of time and effort to organise
- preparation of materials may be difficult and time consuming
- feedback to participants may be difficult
- may not be totally representative – it depends on who attends

Example

Aberdeen City Council is using Planning for Real to consult with socially excluded groups in 12 areas of the city. So far an estimated 3000 people have been consulted to identify priorities. A large number of other partners have been involved and the events have proved to be popular and valued. Some of the spin-offs from Planning for Real have been the establishment of a new community-led organisation, a refurbished play area and a new food co-op.

References and websites

Contact Dave Kilgour, Aberdeen City Council on 01224 523035 or e-mail dkilgour@commdev.aberdeen.net.uk

Also see www.nifonline.org.uk

3. FOCUS GROUPS

Description

A group of 6-12 people brought together to discuss a pre-defined issue in depth. The purpose is to encourage frank discussions to elicit people's perceptions, feelings and opinions about the issue. It is important to have a skilled facilitator who allows all members of the group to participate, to provide a comfortable venue and to ensure that the participants feel confident about expressing their views. The latter can be encouraged by ensuring they have an interest in the topic before they are recruited and, if necessary, providing support for them to attend.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
B	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M

Materials/resources required

- Approximately £1000 per group
- Skilled facilitator to organise and facilitate the focus group and analyse findings
- Flip chart
- Can be tape-recorded but would add significant cost

Strengths

- can be used to gain views of those who may not respond to other forms of consultation, e.g. surveys, written exercises
- good for in-depth exploration of people's views on an issue/service
- can be used at different stages of a consultation process from preliminary to feedback stage
- can target specific groups

Weaknesses

- some people may feel inhibited in expressing non-consensus views
- not guaranteed to be statistically representative because of small numbers involved

Example

Scottish Youth Crime Review – the Scottish Executive commissioned Fairbridge to conduct focus groups with young offenders to get their views on why young people offend, how offending might be prevented, experiences of the criminal justice system and the impact of offending on others. Fairbridge's role in recruiting and running the focus groups, on their premises, helped participants feel safe and supported during the process.

References and websites

"*Stop youth crime now: making it work together*", Scottish Executive, 2000 at www.scotland.gov.uk/youth/crimereview/default.asp

4. DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Description

In-depth interviews are usually carried out on a one-to-one basis, over a period of one half to 2 hours. Interviews are commonly semi-structured, including fixed areas to cover, but also allowing for areas not previously thought of and in-depth coverage. Interviews are suitable for complex or sensitive issues and require skilled interviewers. Telephone interviews may also be suitable, depending on the topic and type of participants.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
B	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H

Materials/resources required

- Approximately £200 per interview, including interview arranging, travel, interviewing, writing up and analysing
- Skilled interviewer to prepare questions, elicit and probe for views and analyse findings
- Can be tape-recorded but would add significant cost

Strengths

- can provide more detailed feedback than group discussion
- can reach non-users and participants as well as users
- can elicit views/issues not previously considered
- can be used to gain views on sensitive or complex issues
- good for in-depth exploration of people's views on an issue/service
- can target specific groups

Weaknesses

- cost
- not guaranteed to be statistically representative because of small numbers involved
- less straightforward to analyse
- interviewees may feel vulnerable on their own (though could do paired interviews)

Example

The Real Deal, a project organised by a partnership between Save the Children, Centrepont, Demos, Pilotlight and the Camelot Foundation, consulted with over 100 young people from socially excluded groups, using mostly group-based techniques. However, 53 young homeless people were consulted using in-depth interviews, as it was considered they would not be easily able to participate in discussion groups. Interviews covered community and sense of belonging, education, employment and training, leisure and social activities and transition to adulthood.

References and websites

"*The Real Deal*", Save the Children, 1999

5. CITIZENS' JURY

Description

A group of 10-25 citizens, representative of the local community, who take evidence and deliberate over a period of 3-5 days on a particular issue and make recommendations. The evidence can be provided by a combination of expert witnesses, written information and audio-visual presentation. It is important that the question or issue the jury is considering is carefully defined from the start. The jury should be led by a skilled facilitator. The commissioning body, e.g. the local authority, usually undertakes beforehand to take full account of the recommendations made by the jury. Some Citizens' Jury processes include a Stakeholder Jury, where stakeholders meet to discuss the recommendations and produce an action plan. There may also be an Inter Jury Forum, which brings together both the Citizens' and Stakeholder Jury for joint discussion and agreement on the proposed action plan.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
B	One-off	✓				✓	H

Materials/resources required

- Skilled facilitation and co-ordination
- Venue, catering, expenses paid to participants
- Considerable staff time in preparation, giving evidence, responding to recommendations etc.
- Training or briefing of jurors is required

Strengths

- good for obtaining informed opinions on complex or controversial issues
- can promote a culture of citizenship and participation
- can help to identify solutions to problems

Weaknesses

- expensive and time-consuming
- doubt about representativeness because of small numbers
- could exclude people with low literacy or non-English speakers

Example

The *Great Northern (Social Inclusion) Partnership* in Aberdeen ran a People's Jury in 2000 on the topic of "How can we improve the quality of life of individuals and families in communities affected by drugs?" 16 people took part over 4 days. Following this the Jury's recommendations were presented to a Stakeholder Jury, comprising high level representatives from key agencies. The third stage brought the two juries together to agree and commit to an action plan. A follow-up event was held in March 2001 to review actions and commit to the development of the GNP Drugs Plan. A drugs strategy group has been formed to take this forward.

References and websites

"The Great Northern Partnership People's Jury 28 February - 3 March 2000", *"Stakeholders' Jury 6-7 March 2000"* and *"People's and Stakeholders' Juries Follow Up Forum 23 March 2001"* from the Great Northern Partnership

"A Guide to Citizens' Juries", South Lanarkshire Council

6. CITIZENS' PANEL (or People's Panel)

Description

A group of about 500-2000 citizens who agree to take part in regular surveys. The panel is selected to be representative of the population. Approximately one-third of the panel is replaced every year to ensure it remains representative. Surveys are usually carried out by post or by telephone and sometimes by convening focus groups of panel members. Many local authorities now have citizens' panels, sometimes run in partnership with health trusts or other bodies. It is often possible for other local organisations to request to use the panel for surveys on particular issues. Larger panels allow sub-groups to be identified, for example young people or those living in a particular area.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
C	On-going	✓	✓ (if large panel)			✓	*L/M

*if using existing panel

Materials/resources required

- As for questionnaire surveys/focus groups above

Strengths

- response rates should be better than for other types of postal questionnaire, because panel members have agreed to take part
- can measure changes over time (although some doubt the validity of this, because panel members get replaced)
- panel members develop understanding of issues over time
- quick and inexpensive method once established
- participants feel valued as long as adequate feedback is given
- allows for partnership approach to consultation
- can undertake research at short notice

Weaknesses

- as panel members become more knowledgeable, they are less representative of the population and need to be replaced
- volunteering to respond to surveys may mean they are more willing than the population at large
- a considerable degree of commitment is required from panel members

Example

South Lanarkshire Council has established a Citizens' Panel of 1600 people, in partnership with the former Scottish Homes, Scottish Enterprise Lanarkshire and Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire Health Boards. The panel membership reflects the statistical profile of South Lanarkshire in terms of socio-economic status, age, gender, tenure and employment status etc. Annual quality of life surveys have been carried out, including questions on drugs, personal safety and crime. Focus groups and Priority Search have also been used with panel members. An evaluation of the citizens' panel is to be published imminently.

References and websites

"South Lanarkshire Citizens Panel - Quality of Life Survey" reports for 1999, 2000 and 2001, South Lanarkshire Council

7. QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Description

Questionnaire surveys can be conducted by post, internet, e-mail, face-to-face or telephone. They can be completed by an interviewer or self completed by respondents. Computer-aided techniques are available, for example, Opinionmeter, which allows respondents to complete questionnaires using a keypad and screen. The Opinionmeter unit is easily moved and can be located in a place accessible to respondents, for example a shopping centre. There are different ways of designing questionnaires, using open or closed questions, multiple choice, rating scales etc. It is important that questionnaires are carefully designed to avoid bias and make it easy for respondents to complete.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
C	One-off	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	L

Materials/resources required

- Skills to design questionnaire and analyse data
- If doing in-house, staff time and relevant statistical package for data analysis
- Approximately £5,000 for 500 person postal survey, analysis and report
- Approximately £5,000 for Opinionmeter

Strengths

- good for obtaining the views of large numbers of people
- data obtained is specific and quantifiable, so can be used for comparisons and measurement of change
- results can be analysed relatively quickly
- face-to-face or telephone completion allows questions to be explained or clarified
- Opinionmeter is user-friendly, quick and economical for snapshots of opinion

Weaknesses

- postal surveys usually have low response rates (10% - 20%)
- use of self-completion, telephone or computer-aided techniques may bias sample by excluding those with low literacy, no telephone or low IT skills respectively
- does not allow for two-way dialogue or exploration of views or issues
- Opinionmeter can only be used for multiple choice questions

Example

Edinburgh Women's Safety Working Group carried out a questionnaire survey of Edinburgh women to find out their feelings on personal safety, to gauge the prevalence of violence in their lives and to learn about the services they used. A self-completion questionnaire was distributed through community groups, workplaces, at train and bus stations and supermarkets. The questionnaire was translated into ethnic languages, large print and Braille, on request.

South Lanarkshire Council used Opinionmeter to test community views about drugs issues, including the location of a proposed needle exchange scheme.

References and websites

"Hidden figures, the 1997 Edinburgh Women's Safety Survey", City of Edinburgh Council, 1997

"Drugs Action Team Opinionmeter Survey" - East Kilbride Drugs Forum & Action Group Report October 2000

Please see www.opinionmeter.co.uk

8. IMAGINE

Description

Imagine is a new approach to community consultation/participation based on 'appreciative enquiry'. It asks people to tell stories of what works. It involves a six-stage process of:

- defining the issues and a set of exploratory questions
- using the questions to draw out stories
- dreaming how the future could be and expressing people's ideas as 'provocative propositions' – ideally done in a one-day workshop
- co-creating the dream by forming partnerships that in turn use the Imagine method
- celebrating the project and its achievements
- evaluating the project

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
D	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	L/M

Materials/resources required

- Training of core group (1-2 days), who then train others in technique
- Materials to take note of conversations/stories
- Suitable venue for workshop/community event
- Skilled and independent facilitation for workshop/s

Strengths

- inclusive – all sections of the community can take part
- based on storytelling, which is familiar and fun
- links people who don't normally meet
- participants learn skills
- flexible – can be used in a conference or a high street, for a wide range of issues
- creates a shared vision
- visions rooted in success, so should have realistic outcomes
- generates commitment and social action – the willingness and ability of people to act for the common interest

Weaknesses

- new in Britain therefore relatively untested here (though has been successful in USA)
- may be seen as strange and trendy
- may not be representative

Example

Sustainability Thanet used Imagine to build a community vision for Thanet in 2020. Workshops were held with 186 local people to find out who and what they appreciated most in Thanet and what could be built on in the future. Using local people's stories and visions, a series of Vision Statements was created. A touring Visioning Conference was held over two weekends, at which 350 local people gave their views. From this, a Vision for Thanet in 2020 was produced which identifies actions and priorities for the years ahead.

References and websites

"Looking to the Future", Thanet Local Agenda 21, 2000

"Tools for participation", New Economics Foundation information pack "Imagine: a briefing" at www.neweconomics.org/Default.asp?strRequest=pubs&strContext=pubdetails&intPubID=50

9. ACTION RESEARCH

Description

Action research is an approach that enables workers to explore issues, difficulties and experiences in a collaborative and participative way with clients, to identify and test out solutions. It involves a cyclical process of identifying a problem, action planning, action taking, evaluating and identifying findings. It differs from traditional models of research in its participative orientation and because it is usually worker-led rather than led by an external expert. It can be used with groups or individuals.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
D	On-going	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	L/M

Materials/resources required

- People skills – knowledge of the needs and experiences of a particular client group, ability to engage with clients, either individually or in groups
- Research skills
- Materials such as flipchart, newspaper cuttings, scenarios, games, questionnaires, the means to record, e.g. video
- Ability to collect and analyse qualitative data

Strengths

- can be incorporated into everyday work as part of reflexive and responsive approach
- inclusive – can be used with any groups and is appropriate for socially excluded groups
- flexible
- responsive - ability to develop/reformulate agenda with the work
- problem solving and tests solutions

Weaknesses

- can lose focus unless research question is tightly defined
- may not be representative

Example

Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership, Stonewall and Victim Support Scotland are carrying out a joint action research project to investigate young peoples' experiences of victimisation and their perceptions of support services (and why they often don't use them); and to use data gathered to make changes to services. Techniques being used include group discussion, mapping, semi-structured interviews, drama and a graffiti wall. Materials being used include newspaper cuttings, scenarios, disposable cameras, post-its and issue cards.

References and websites

"Action Research Toolkit", Edinburgh Youth Social Inclusion Partnership, 2000 at www.youthinclusion.org/inclusion/inclusion_reports.php and information on project at www.youthinclusion.org/project/current_crime.htm

10. PRIORITY SEARCH

Description

Priority Search uses focus groups and surveys, supported by specially developed software, to identify and rank needs and priorities. The first stage is to convene focus groups to consider the research question. Focus groups should enable free flow of ideas, focus on the future and generate possible solutions. Telephone or face-to-face interviews can be used to incorporate the views of those who cannot take part. The software is then used to generate a questionnaire based on themes emerging from the focus groups. Larger numbers of people can take part in the questionnaire stage of the process. The questionnaire consist of paired statements to allow respondents to rate them against each other. The software generates a ranked list of priorities.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
D	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	L/M

Materials/resources required

- Priority search software (£3,000 for software and 2 days training; £8,000 if includes 7 days training and small project; or
- From £3,000 for mini-conference to £20,000 for large scale project carried out by consultants)
- Skilled facilitation
- Flip chart
- Venue for focus groups

Strengths

- wide variety of issues can be addressed
- allows community prioritising of options
- focuses on solutions
- one issue can be explored in detail
- software allow instant results to be generated, therefore useful for events
- can identify differences in attitudes between different groups
- flexible and fast
- combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques

Weaknesses

- big issues may dominate at the expense of smaller but nonetheless important issues
- quantitative nature of results may make solutions appear too simple

Example

Inverclyde Youth Pathfinder, Youth Strategy Group and Inverclyde Youth Council used Priority Search to consult with young people on "What would make Inverclyde a better place to live". The consultation was carried out at a day-long conference attended by over 75 young people, with focus groups held in the morning and questionnaires completed later in the day. Overall priorities were identified along with priorities for different geographical areas and age groups.

References and websites

"Talk Back Youth Consultation Report", Inverclyde Regeneration Partnership, 2000

Please see www.priority-research.com

11. COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION

Description

Representatives of community groups with an interest in a given topic (e.g. drugs action) are invited to join a policy or strategy group. This generally involves them attending regular meetings, representing their group/organisation's views and providing an input into the development, implementation and evaluation of strategies. It is important to give representatives the capacity, knowledge and time to both represent their group and participate effectively and to consider meeting times, travel arrangements and expenses.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
D	On-going	✓	✓	✓	?		L/M

Materials/resources required

- Information, training and briefing sessions to enable effective representation and participation
- Suitable venue
- Transport
- Publicity to generate and sustain interest
- Paying expenses of representatives

Strengths

- provides long term community engagement (many other techniques are one-off)
- capacity building of community groups
- can gain from knowledge and expertise of community groups
- can help generate new ideas and provide early warning of problems
- creates rapport and trust over time

Weaknesses

- may be too formal and structured for community representatives
- if not well-resourced and supported, community groups may not be able to sustain involvement
- difficult to achieve in remote communities
- may get 'usual suspects'
- difficult to ensure genuine representation

Example

Forth Valley Substance Action Team is the lead strategic partnership body for substance action in Forth Valley. Its members include representatives of the three local authorities in the Forth Valley area, the primary care trust, the police and local prison. A voluntary sector perspective is provided by a representative of the Counselling and Support Services for Alcohol and Drugs and a community perspective is provided by a representative from Culterhove for Change. Community input is also provided by formal and informal links with the three local substance misuse forums based in the three local authority areas. The forums have budgets for training, expenses and support for members.

References and websites

"Forth Valley SAT Operating structure" Forth Valley Substance Action Team

"Forth Valley SAT Terms of reference for local substance forums" Forth Valley Substance Action Team

12. COMMUNITY FORA

Description

Ongoing groups established for consultation and participation, focusing on a particular topic, e.g. drug and alcohol action. They may have a fixed or open membership and can use different techniques, such as meetings, events, seminars and workshops to focus on specific issues of concern. They should be as representative as possible of the relevant interests concerned. Use of a facilitator can help to ensure that proceedings run smoothly, balanced consideration is given to issues, all views are aired and a way forward is agreed. They may be established to provide a wider community input to a strategic group. Capacity building may be required to ensure effective representation and participation.

Issue	One-off or ongoing	Community groups					Cost
		Shared location	Age/gender/ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
D	On-going	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	M

Materials/resources required

- Suitable venue
- Publicity to generate and sustain interest
- Facilitator may be required
- Materials/resources for chosen techniques of consultation
- Information, training and briefing sessions to enable effective representation and participation
- May need to pay expenses
- Printing and stationery costs

Strengths

- can allow for wider community input to strategic group
- can provide long term community engagement (many other techniques are one-off)
- possible capacity building of community groups
- can gain from knowledge and expertise of community groups
- can help generate new ideas and provide early warning of problems
- can consider a wide range of issues and help to determine priorities
- can use a variety of other engagement techniques

Weaknesses

- needs sufficient support and resources to sustain community involvement
- difficult to achieve in remote communities
- may get 'usual suspects'
- difficult to ensure genuine representation
- may be perceived as a talking shop if it doesn't focus on action

Example

West Lothian Drug and Alcohol Concern is a forum open to any individual and groups who are interested in furthering the forum's objectives; which are to promote education and action on substance misuse. Three to four public events are organised each year in local communities and addressing local concerns. The results of the discussions are fed back to the DAT. Discussion at a recent event on alcohol formed an important part of the DAT's response to the consultation on the national plan for alcohol. A newsletter is produced by the forum and widely distributed in West Lothian.

References and websites

"Script" newsletter from West Lothian Drug and Alcohol Concern

CHAPTER 6: REVIEWING AND EVALUATING

This review suggests that a community engagement strategy that **incorporates a range of approaches** is likely to be required to ensure effective engagement. It is also likely that DATs will need to work with all agencies and partnerships in their area to ensure that engagement is **inclusive**, but to avoid what is sometimes known as 'consultation fatigue' or 'research fatigue'. This occurs when the population has been consulted or researched on too many occasions.

It will be important to **review** community engagement activities periodically to ensure that they are inclusive, broadly representative and appropriate. Annual review of these activities seems sensible to take stock of existing activities and to plan for the year ahead. This should also help avoid duplication of effort between agencies and to help maximise the use of engagement resources in an area. For example, there are Citizen's Panels in many areas of Scotland that could potentially be used by other agencies.

However, it will also be important to **evaluate** any engagement strategy to assess whether the aims and objectives have been met. It may also be valuable to evaluate specific approaches or methods that have been piloted or used, particularly if they have been resource intensive. The follow-up evaluation of two pilot People's Juries in SIPs is one example of evaluation in this field www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/resfinds/drf106-00.asp

An evaluation of an engagement strategy, or a specific method or approach will usually involve measuring inputs (e.g. resources needed to run the event), outputs (the throughputs of the event) and outcomes (the resulting impacts of the event). Further information on evaluation planning and implementation can be found in the EIU evaluation guides at www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/eiu/eiu.htm These guides are produced on a monthly basis on evaluation in the drugs misuse field. **It is envisaged that the EIU will produce an Evaluation Guide on evaluating community engagement in 2002.**

Community groups too should periodically review their engagement with local decision-makers and assess what could be done better. As with the DATs and their agencies, it is also important to plan ahead for activities in the coming months or years. As illustrated in this review the nature of **community groups develop and change over time** (e.g. to becoming service providers themselves) and the group's aims, objectives and activities need to be reviewed accordingly.

APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY TABLE

SUMMARY TABLE								
Technique	Issue	Ongoing or one-off technique	Community groups					Cost
			Shared location	Age/ gender/ ethnic group	Shared interest	Socially excluded	General public	
Open Space	A	One-off	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	L
Planning for Real	A	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M
Focus groups	B	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	M
In depth interviews	B	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	H
Citizens' Jury	B	One-off	✓				✓	H
Citizens' Panel	C	Ongoing	✓	✓*			✓	L/M**
Questionnaire survey	C	One-off	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	L
Imagine	D	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	L/M
Action Research	D	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	L/M
Priority Search	D	One-off	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	L/M
Community representation	D	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓	?		L/M
Community forums	D	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	M

* if panel large enough

** assuming use of existing panel

APPENDIX 2: REFERENCES AND INFORMATION SOURCES

- Cabinet Office Service First Unit Consult your users: an introductory guide
<http://www.servicefirst.gov.uk/1998/guidance/users/index.htm>
- Community Development Foundation. The New Community Strategies: how to involve local people (2000) <http://www.cdf.org.uk/html/NewCommStrats.pdf>
- COSLA Focusing on citizens: a guide to approaches and methods (1999)
- COSLA. The citizen-customer focus: directory of initiatives by councils (1999)
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