

Effective Interventions Unit

Evaluation Guide 10

Evaluating community engagement

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE? This tenth guide looks at evaluating community engagement strategies and activities. It discusses the definition of community engagement and the aims and objectives of both engagement strategies and specific engagement exercises. Examples from the substance misuse field and related fields are used for illustration.

WHO SHOULD READ IT? Anyone involved in, or responsible for, ensuring the community have a voice in decision making on drugs issues in their local area.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement can be hard to define, but usually refers to activities designed to **give the local community an opportunity to contribute to decision making on drug-related issues**. Experience shows that community engagement can help target resources more effectively and ensure services are tailored to local need. It also encourages local people to take greater responsibility for what happens in their area, helping to ensure that lasting and sustainable change takes place.

Defining both **'community'** and **'engagement'** is not straightforward. For example, 'community' can mean people living in the same geographical area, people with similar characteristics (e.g. age, gender) or groups who come together with a common interest (e.g. drug users' families). Similarly, engagement can range from 'consultation' (where a community may be asked for their opinion) to 'development' (where a community may provide a service itself).

The figure below helps to illustrate **different levels** of engagement. At one end of the continuum, consultation may simply mean the provision of information. At the other end of the continuum, empowerment and development may involve the community creating a vision of its own and actively participating in working towards it. These definitions and further information about effective community engagement can be found in EIU's publication 'Effective engagement: a guide to principles and practice' at www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/goodpractice/EIU_commeng.pdf

FIGURE 1: LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

The first step to achieving community engagement is to develop a community engagement strategy. To develop such a strategy it will be important to address the following questions:

- Which community is to be engaged? e.g. drug users, their families, the wider public?
- Why do we want to engage with the community?
- How can we best engage with the community we've identified?
- How can we review and evaluate the success of the strategy?

There is a range of approaches set out in the EIU document cited above that can help to make a community engagement strategy operational. These include tried and tested techniques such as Planning for Real, People's Juries and Imagine. These tend to be **one-off exercises**, although they can be repeated. However, community engagement can also be **on-**

Effective Interventions Unit

going and consistent by including community representatives in the decision making process and encouraging and supporting the development of community fora.

A community engagement strategy that incorporates **a range of approaches** is likely to be most successful. For example, there may be occasions when eliciting the views of a community on a specific topic is sufficient. However, there may be other occasions when it may be appropriate for the community to have a greater level of engagement.

CAN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BE EVALUATED?

It is possible to take a **structured approach** to evaluating community engagement. An important distinction to make at this stage is the evaluation of the engagement **strategy**, and the evaluation of specific **approaches or exercises** that form a component part of the engagement strategy. There have not been many evaluations conducted and published in this area, which can make designing an evaluation more difficult. However, there are some basic principles of evaluation that can be applied including: involving all stakeholders in the evaluation process, clearly identifying the intervention, strategy or technique to be evaluated, clearly identifying the aims and objectives of the evaluation and agreeing on the most appropriate methods to be used. For further information on definitions and concepts of evaluation and planning an evaluation, please see EIU evaluation guides 1 and 2.

EVALUATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Evaluation of a community engagement strategy is easier when a number of factors are resolved when developing the strategy. **Ideally, the strategy will have defined:**

- Aims and objectives (what the engagement strategy expects to achieve)
- Inputs (what resources have been dedicated to community engagement)
- The process of engagement (how engagement will actually be implemented)
- Outputs (what the expected products of engagement are)
- Outcomes (what the expected effects of engagement are)

An evaluation of the strategy will probably focus on whether the aims and objective of the strategy have been achieved, with a view to revising aims and objectives and adjusting the strategy to be more inclusive. There are a number of **key principles** that can be useful to remember when evaluating community engagement strategies.

A useful framework that sets out these key principles is the **ABCD programme** (see below). This work is in the closely related area of community development. The ABCD programme was developed because of the lack of systematic evaluation of community development interventions. ABCD provides a **framework for planning and learning from community development initiatives by encouraging those involved in community development to be clear about their aims, how they plan to achieve the identified aims, and how revisions can be made in light of experience.**

Example: The Achieving Better Community Development (ABCD) programme

The **ABCD evaluation model** is based on community development principles and sets out some key considerations for evaluation, namely:

- evaluation should be an integral part of community engagement which continuously informs planning and action
- all stakeholders (including the community) should participate
- evaluation criteria and design should reflect the aims and objectives of all stakeholders
- attention should be given to evaluating the empowerment communities develop and the changes in the quality of community life that result

Further information can be downloaded at www.scdc.org.uk/abcd/about.htm

A host of data sources and methods can be used to help evaluate a community engagement strategy. For example:

- **documentary evidence** which is routinely collected may be useful (e.g. minutes of meetings, community newsletters).
- **monitoring participation** at events and meetings can help collect information on the characteristics of those who get involved. For example, evaluations of public meetings have shown that these are a relatively ineffective means of getting young people involved in community developments.

Effective Interventions Unit

- **interviews and / or focus groups** with the range of stakeholders, including representatives from the community to elicit their views on the extent to which community engagement strategies and activities have been useful. It may also be important to consider how the strategy and activities could be improved.

EVALUATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

As noted earlier, there are a number of **specific techniques** that can be used to involve community members in local decision making. These can be used as part of a broader community engagement strategy. These include techniques such as Citizen's Juries, Citizen's Panels, Imagine, Planning for Real and focus groups. Details of these techniques are set out in the EIUs guide to effective engagement at www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/goodpractice/EIU_commeng.pdf

There are lots of examples of community engagement techniques, but **very few evaluations**. Such exercises are often time consuming and resource intensive to organise. Thus, including an evaluation in the process may initially add to the workload. However, there are a number of advantages to including an evaluation as an integral part of the process. In particular, an evaluation can establish whether the exercise met its aims and objectives, help assess whether further exercises should be organised and tease out what lessons can be learned to help inform future exercises of this nature.

EXAMPLES OF EVALUATIONS

Jury on Drugs

In summer 2000, the Great Northern Partnership (GNP) in Aberdeen ran a Jury on Drugs. This was a three stage process. The **first stage** was a People's Jury (commonly comprising between 11-16 members of the community) which was presented with evidence from a range of witnesses including GPs, young people, social workers, families of drug users and drug workers. The Jury was then asked to formulate recommendations for the Stakeholder Jury to consider.

The **second stage** was a Stakeholder Jury (comprising senior stakeholders from local agencies) which considered the recommendations of the People's Jury. This Jury decided whether to accept the recommendations and to consider how best to take forward the recommendations. If a recommendation was not accepted by the Stakeholder Jury, they had to explain why.

The **third stage** was an Inter-Jury forum where the People's Jury and Stakeholder Jury came together to agree a plan of action. The question for the juries was 'how can we improve the quality of life for individuals and families in communities affected by drugs? For more about the Jury process please see www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/resfinds/df97-00.asp

How was the Jury process evaluated?

After the Juries were conducted it was important to establish the appropriateness and usefulness of the jury process and to ascertain whether the jury process and the resulting plan of action had any impact. Key questions for the evaluation included:

- Did jurors find the jury process useful / enjoyable / empowering?
- Did the witnesses consider the jury to be useful / appropriate?
- Were the recommendations from the jury process taken forward?
- Did the jury process have an influence on subsequent decision making?
- Did the jury process have a positive impact on partnership working in the area?
- What lessons were learnt about consulting the community?

To tackle these questions, data were collected immediately after the jury process and at a six month follow-up. **Immediately after** the People's Jury and Stakeholder Jury, all members were asked to complete a short questionnaire asking them about their experience of the jury process, the representativeness of the jury and their satisfaction with the recommendations made. The witnesses invited to give evidence were also asked to complete a questionnaire to elicit their views of the jury process.

The **follow up** involved conducting telephone interviews with all those involved in the Jury process including the members of the community who sat on the People's Jury and the representatives from local agencies who participated in the Stakeholders Jury.

Tackling
drugs in
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West Lothian Youth Fora

Pilot youth fora were set up in Blackburn, Livingston and Broxburn in 1997. The underlying rationale of the fora is to **make local government more accessible and responsive to the needs of young people**. They form part of the West Lothian Council's community engagement strategy. Since the inception of these fora, a number of smaller youth fora have been established in other parts of the council area. A whole range of issues have been discussed and raised with the council. These include health, transport, employment, community safety and drug and alcohol use.

How were the youth fora evaluated?

An evaluation of the youth fora was conducted to establish whether the aims and objectives of the fora have been met and to assist the council in deciding whether further fora should be developed. The evaluation was also designed to highlight how the structure of the fora and the relationship with the council could be improved (if at all).

The evaluation was designed to collect information on a **number of criteria**:

- Representativeness of the fora
- Levels of attendance
- Issues raised and discussed at the fora
- Outcomes from the foras' work
- Council use and support
- Educational experiences

Data were collected from **three sources**:

- documentary evidence (including the minutes of the fora)
- interviews with local agency staff working with the youth fora
- focus groups conducted with the young people involved in the fora

So, this evaluation drew on data from three sources to build a picture of how useful the youth forum model was in the area. The perspectives of both local agency staff and young people themselves were elicited as part of this evaluation exercise.

IN SUMMARY

- It is possible to take a structured approach to evaluating community engagement strategies and specific community engagement activities.
- Evaluations of community engagement (with most evaluations) will principally focus on whether the aims and objectives of the strategy or activity have been achieved.
- Evaluation should be an integral part of a community engagement strategy or activity involving all stakeholders (including the community).
- Relatively few evaluations have been conducted in this area, but the evaluations that have been completed use data from a range of sources including documentary evidence, interviews, focus groups and observation.

Further resources

Effective Interventions Unit. Effective Engagement: A Guide to Principles and Practice. Scottish Executive (2002)
www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/goodpractice/EIU_commeng.pdf

New Economics Foundation. Participation Works: 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century (2001)
www.neweconomics.org/