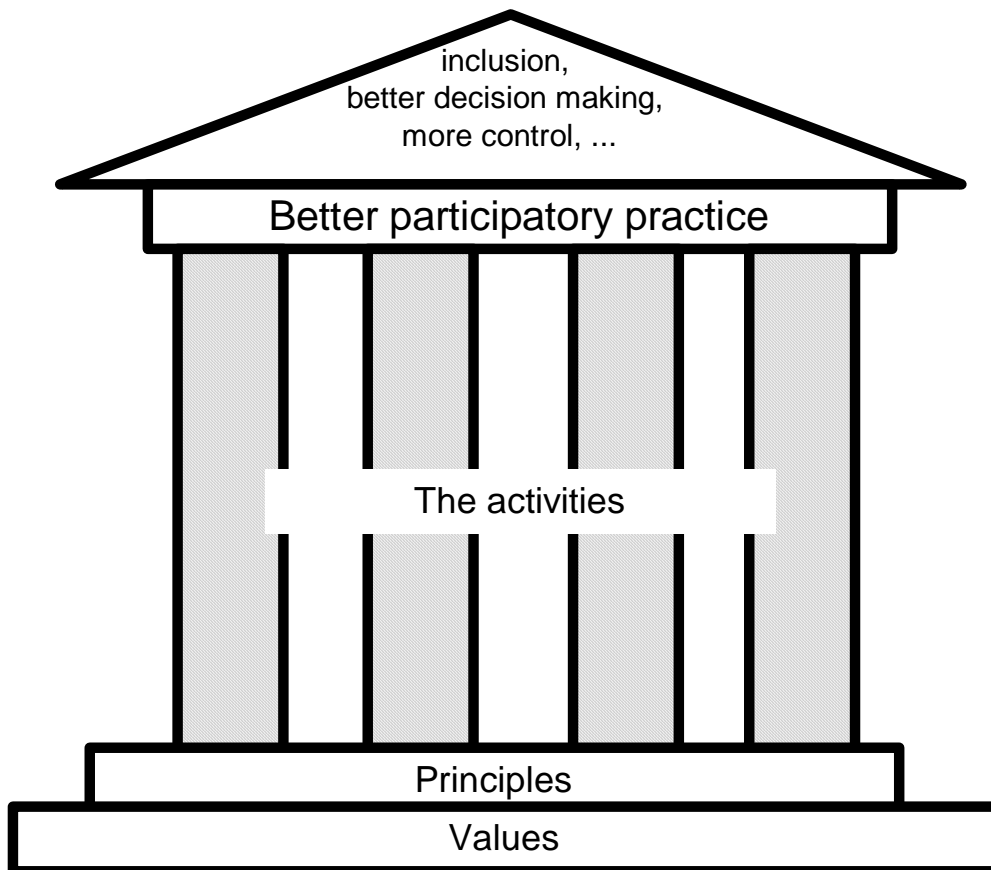


Participatory Practitioners for Change St Colms, Edinburgh

9-10 November 2005



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1. Introduction

This was the fourth meeting of the Participatory Practitioners for Change group, and the last to be directly funded by the Oxfam UK Poverty Programme¹. As had been agreed at the previous meeting (April 05), the purpose of this meeting was to take the PPfC group to a new phase, independent of the Oxfam support. It was therefore to be very different from previous meetings, where we have been able to agree an agenda and process at the meeting itself. At the meeting at Shepherd's Dene it was proposed that a small 'Future' working group would explore and develop options for the future of the PPfC (to be presented to the meeting in November) and also develop a programme and process for the November 05 meeting. The following participants volunteered to be part of that smaller group:

Kate Gant, Duncan Fuller, Kirsty Blackstock, Maitrisara, Tom Wakeford, Jasber Singh, Charlotte Flower

The working group promised to prepare some ideas and thoughts to spark and inform discussion, and these were circulated prior to the November meeting (Annex A.1 to A.3).

The minimum outcomes of the St Colm's meeting were expected to be:

- an agreement of the general vision and purpose of the network
- an agreement of the structure the network could take (in terms of management and decision making, ways of funding, membership)
- at least seven people who would be able to take forward the development of the network, by forming some kind of 'interim strategy group' in the lead up to the next meeting.

The meeting was facilitated by the working group above, with additional support of Megan Evans, Carola Addington and Peter Bryant.

1.1 Participants

Amarjit Kaur
Carola Addington
Charlotte Flower
Chris Cosgrove
Chris Southworth
Clare Symonds
Duncan Fuller
Emma Jermy
Jasber Singh
Jo Rowlands
John Rowley
Kate
Gant
Kate Lonsdale
Kirsty Blackstock

¹ Please see:

- PA 'Movers and Shakers' retreat, Charney Manor, 21-22 April 2004
- Participatory Practitioners for Change; second meeting at Charney Manor, 26-27 Oct 2004
- Participatory Practitioners for Change: Shepherds Dene, 5th May 2005

Lucky Nessa
Martin Halton
Megan Evans
Mo Colvin
Peter Bryant
Rachel Fowden
Richard Wilson
Sarah Madden
Tom Wakeford
Vicky Johnson
Vikki Hilton

Last minute apologies:

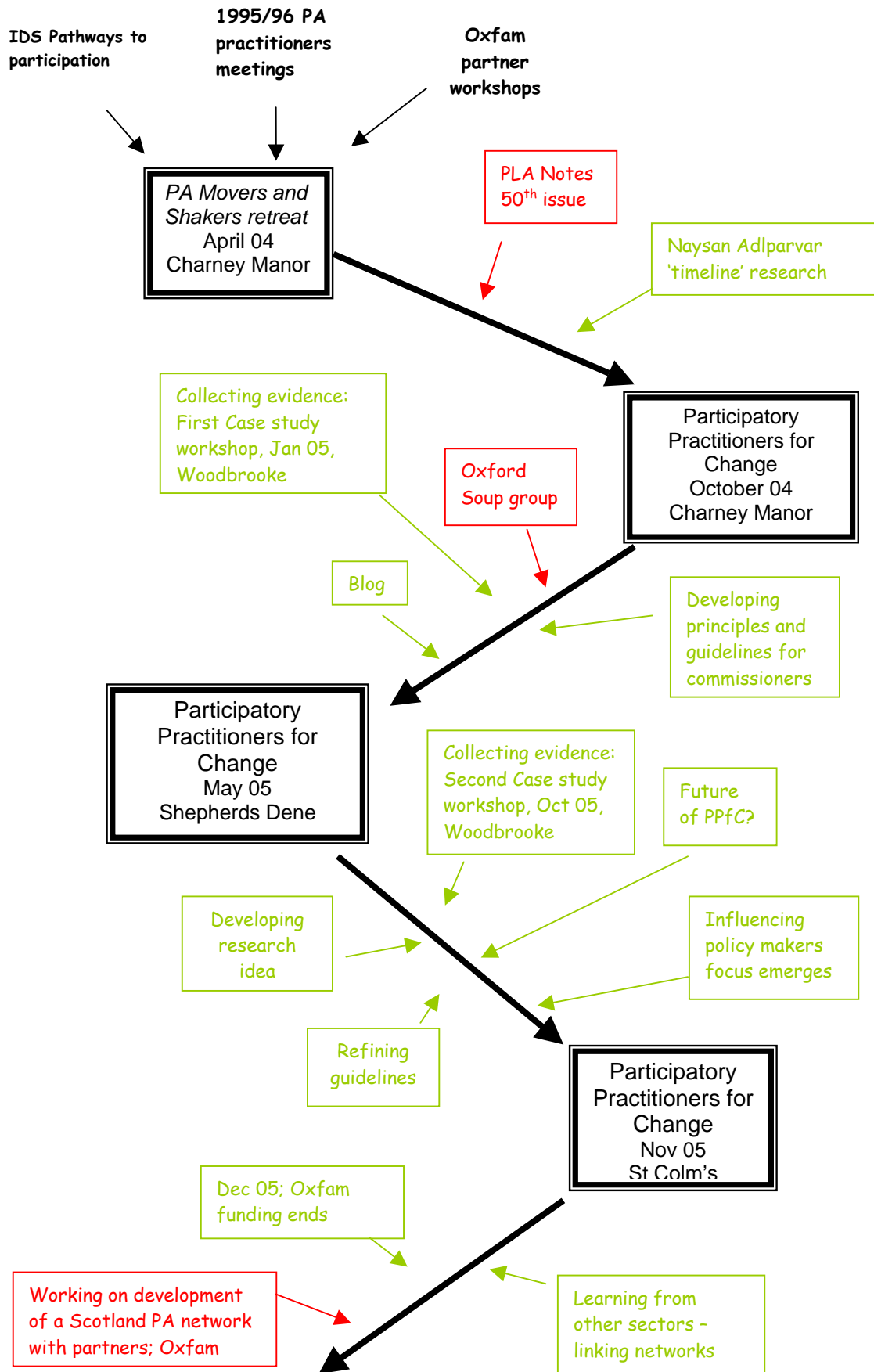
Eve Bevan
Maitrisara
Roger Newton
Scott Jones

1.2 The story so far:

There were a number of participants who had not been to any of the previous retreats, and so in the first session we provided an opportunity for new members to hear from 'old' what had happened before. Charlotte presented a timeline of the process, and requested that people add additional notes that covered impact and activities (see Figure 1).

In addition, John Rowley very briefly presented the ongoing work of the principles and commissioners guidelines. He and Maitrisara had worked together to redraft both these documents and invited participants to comment on these over the meeting. Final versions (adopting comments and edits proposed at the meeting) are available in Annex B and C.

Figure 1: timeline of the PPfC story



2. What do we want to achieve? Clarifying the Vision

Each participant was asked to draw two images (and/or write words) describing their view of a future PPfC NETWORK that (i) that they did not want to see (a nightmare view), and (ii) they would like to see (utopian image). We then linked up into groups of four, each person was asked to share their image of a future network. Positive and negative commonalities were identified, as well as differences within each group.

SOME COMMONALITIES WITHIN EACH GROUP

Utopian images	Nightmare images
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A network to reflect, share and learn to support & develop our own practice and to strengthen our influence as individuals / organisations / collectives • Understanding of different practise • Representative of grassroots / inclusive • Action oriented / doing / learning / laughing • Confident / resources / skills development • Level playing field / power sharing • Co-operation • Lobbying / influencing policy and improving practice • A powerful collective with a real focus and purpose / little volcanoes • An organisation you can refer to – have some clout / status • Identifying and promoting good practice (including good practice and examples from the South and elsewhere) • A network – virtual and / or real of people with shared understanding. • Colleagues who you know are singing from the same hymn sheets • Strong, viable, 2006 bank statement £1K • Open • Linking of networks • Clear aims and objectives – what it's going to do. • Clear identity – what makes it different • Clout / status • Change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time intensive / lack of ownership • A 'talking shop' / 'think-tank' / 'wittersers' • A clique / exclusive / closed / inward looking • Competitiveness / hierarchy • Unsustainable / being unrealistic of what we can do / trying to do everything • Reliance on Oxfam / still 'Oxfamy' • 1000s of emails • People use it only and not give to it. • Constrained by words – "PA" + purist?

Some key commonalities and (significantly very few) differences between all the groups were highlighted.

SHARED COMMONALITIES ACROSS ALL THE GROUPS

- Strength in diversity – of experiences → build on understanding of this
- No quick fixes
- No fixed formula / standards
- Changing membership / participation

- Involving wider community (not just facilitators) But how?

SHARED DIFFERENCES

- Language and languages – need for time to understand different approaches;

We explored these areas in a little more depth and attempted to organise them into a framework that would guide our discussions as we thought more about the type of network we wanted, and how it should be structured, and function. A grid was developed outlining who the network is, where it is, how it should be and what will it do.

KEY QUESTIONS & ISSUES - areas of tension are highlighted in green below.

Where should the network be?	Who should be involved in the network?	How should it be?	What will it do?
Local / national / international	<i>Inclusion vs. quality</i>	Inclusive	Can we live with the tension?
	Representation of the grass roots	Not a hierarchy	Support each other
	Grass roots attendance	Network	Reflecting
	<i>Changing membership / attendance</i>	Co-operation	Learn
	<i>Form (structure)</i>	<i>Challenge of making it happen</i>	Do something others don't do
		<i>Resources</i>	<i>Function (why?)</i>
		<i>Language</i>	
		<i>Shared values?</i>	

3. Turning the vision into a reality/action

This session followed afternoon tea on 9th November, and consisted of linking the previous session on visioning the purpose and remit of the PPfC, and associated issues that had been expressed in plenary, with the concrete examples and practical aspects raised in the working papers circulated prior to the workshop. The following issues were acknowledged:

- 'chicken and egg' nature of selecting intent without knowing about structures or about available resources;
- commonality – wanting to be a network of networks that lobby, influence, learn and act to improve participatory practice – might be a false consensus as a lack of shared language can exclude or obscure conflict

Tom explained how the visions might link to these papers through the yellow and green summary cards developed in the previous session. The purpose of the session was to explore elements of a good structure that would address these issues before 'closing down' the debate by selecting a structure for the ongoing network.

Groups self-organised themselves around themes of their choice and created posters that were reported back to the group. The groups are listed in alphabetical order:

Action Planning: (Megan, Vicky, Kate)

- Pragmatism versus idealism – options for grassroots alliance ideal but take pragmatic approach focussing on how to link grassroots – change the world one step at a time
- Why - Aim – to improve participatory practice in the UK
- What - Objectives – influencing power holders, impact on policy, promoting good practice, sharing experiences
- How – Activities – eg sharing workshops, collective response to consultations from Government – need activities to help keep the network going (e.g. database, linking networks, better name)
- All activities need to address – who, where, when, what resources; and think about impact versus energy expended when prioritising

Inclusive versus Quality: (John, Jaz, Pete, Clare, Vikki, Jo, Carola)

- Networks work when people put energy in and get something back
- There are many people energised by participatory processes – tap into this
- Find ways of bringing people together who have that energy
- How to involve the wider spectrum of practitioners
- You can't be passively inclusive

Language: (Charlotte, Amarjit, Martin, Kate, Mo, Richard, Chris C)

- Clear about what is PA – no meaning to new members
- Understanding people's language
- Share people's practice
- We talk about local people but do they understand our language – use language that is relevant to them
- What is membership and what does it mean?
- What is the mission?
- Think about mission link to structure – does it need to change?

Resources: (Emma, Tom, Sarah)

- Divided into what we need and how do we get it? Of course, what need depends on structure!

What we need	How do we get it
Admin time and associated office costs for an address – approx one week per meeting	Participatory budgeting for each meeting – e.g. who needs to come to each meeting
Travel costs: 25 people = £750 Principles for claiming (about 2/3 claim) How to keep low? Ecological sustainability	1% tax system but how would that work? Claim as little as possible to reinvest surplus in keeping network going
Accounting and visible budgeting – auditing costs	Treasurer and Auditor volunteers
Venue hire and accom + food	Free venues/in kind
Website, e-networks and reports Literacy support to assist with access - tensions between F2F and internet/phone	
	Fundraising sub group
How to maintain contact list? Time taken to chase people when away/not answering emails?	
Is PPFC an empowerment group?	

Unique Selling Point for PPFC: (no names attached)

- Equality
- everyone's opinions count
- inclusive aspirations
- learning together
- practitioners – grounded in practice
- uncompetitive – safe deliberative space
- skills development
- cross-sectoral expertise

4. The draft planning framework

After supper on the Wednesday, with energy levels having dipped considerably, we decided to focus on what we all felt the network should actually do – the types of activities we would like to see happen. We used the framework of the four objectives that had been outlined by one of the small groups in the previous session; they had explored pragmatism vs idealism and had suggested that we develop a planning framework about a clear purpose, aims and objectives. The latter were highlighted as:

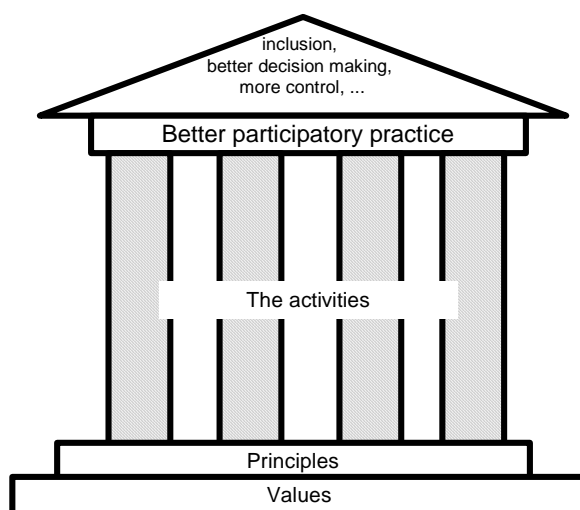
1. influence decision makers
2. impact on policy
3. promoting good practice
4. sharing experience

The group split into two groups, one explored objectives 1 and 2, the other objectives 3 and 4. These discussions generated many ideas, far too many to be realistically achieved. We asked the whole group to rank them by 'voting' with the following criteria:

- would you like to be involved/part of such an activity? (place a dot)
- Would you be able to organise it (add name)
- Do you know of any possible resources that could be made available for the activity? (add a post-it with relevant information)

The ranked activities were then fitted into an overall planning framework agreed by the group. In the last session of the meeting we identified who would like to be involved in each, and these working groups are included in the framework below.

In developing the framework, the overall rationale behind what we thought we should be achieving was summarised in the diagram below:



The work of the network is based on a set of shared values and everything we do should be done in accordance with the principles that we have developed (and will continue to review and develop). This is the underlying foundation of who we are, and the 'glue' that holds us together as a group. Our purpose (to be achieved through a range of activities) is to facilitate better participatory practice and so work towards more inclusive and better decision making processes within communities and for communities within local, regional and national decision making processes.

Activities	notes	Who
<p>1. Participant led events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate consultation with grass roots groups and decision making • Themed / and or regional sharing with key policy messages / briefings e.g. health transport drug and alcohol misuse community safety • As practitioners/artist/workers explore with interest/ideas/around linking to a network • Support local networks with interaction with service providers/policy providers • Bring together people (facilitators and Participants) to share ideas and energies and events • Direct Action 	<p>10k from ESRC if knowledge focus</p>	<p>These 3 categories were grouped together: Vicky Johnson Richard Wilson Tom Wakeford (Peter Bryant) (Jasber Singh) Chris Cosgrove Martin Halton Amarjit Kaur Vikki Hilton Duncan Fuller Mo Colvin</p>
<p>2. Conferences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual conference 06 • Road shows as opposed to conferences • Two meetings per year • Knowledge power summit, knowledge from a variety of perspectives • Reports to policy makers • Papers at conferences 		
<p>3. Policy focused events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community regeneration events • Community planning (around events) public /private? Partnerships • Thematic events for anti poverty networks • Developing key strategies through LA partnerships • Link up various initiatives and an event to share learning • Identify key policy areas currently been developed and have email/ blog broadly fed into debate through small group • Power holder identification • Policy blockages identification • Inviting decision makers to processes. Large event/conference. Key people involved in participatory activities Commissioners Policy planners Trainers/ facilitators Participants etc 		

Activities	notes	Who
<p>4. Case Study Dissemination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which • How\Where\to Who\With what? • Send examples to a think tank INVOLVE DEMOS IPPR 		<p>Kate Lonsdale Charlotte Flower Vicky Johnson Duncan Fuller Jo Rowlands Sarah Madden Richard Wilson Kirsty Blackstock</p>
<p>5. Skills Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emersion programme for local councillors (scrutiny) • Specific thematic focus groups • Set up working groups on key sectors and decide how to reach the people that need to be influenced in order to improve practice • Mentoring • Share with each other what we have been doing • Exploring different approaches what are you doing where and why? • Action Learning sets Buddy mentoring groups to explore issues we want to learn more about • Share understanding, • Share values • Series of skill development events <p>Closures what do we need to end for this to happen partnerships / networks /experiences</p>		<p>Megan Evans Kate Gant Richard Wilson Sarah Madden</p>
<p>6. Supporting Networks and getting information about them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up initiatives locally to identify the issues of a variety of people • Commissioned mapping of different networks through the country • Existing events to interact with • Capture voices and co mobilise 		<p>Duncan Fuller Martin Halton Richard Wilson</p>
<p>7. Lobby pack and lobbying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting participatory methods of working to decision makers through reports and lobbying • Lobby politicians a lobby pack • Update newsletter with key policy developments contacts events members can engage with • Campaign to raise awareness • User-friendly info sheets; circulate through different agencies e.g. National / local Gov/ community and voluntary sector 		<p>Kirsty Blackstock Duncan Fuller</p>

Activities	notes	Who
<p>8. Guidelines for commissioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote principles of participation • What it means • Why do it • To who/ how/ impact • Develop guidelines for funders policy makers commissioners and get feedback on these to evaluate their use and influence • Participation works examples/ methods for evaluation cost effectiveness • First hand dialogue grass roots collective 		Kirsty Blackstock Kate Gant
<p>9. e-networks/newsletter to share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information/communication about events/processes • electronic communication • virtual forum for Q and A 		Chris Cosgrove MP Duncan Fuller
<p>10. Website</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resource base • virtual library • website full of practical ideas and examples of participatory practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • links to other sites • UNN could house • Oxfam website as temporary site 	Charlotte Flower Duncan Fuller Carola Addington Chris Cosgrove Jo Rowlands
<p>11. meetings like this (but not like this)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network meetings, twice a year to review progress and plan 		Duncan Fuller Kirsty Blackstock
<p>12. Face to face networking to share</p>		Duncan Fuller
<p>13. Fundraising</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possible JRCT application • use our connections to get staff for free 	Carola Addington Tom Wakeford Charlotte Flower Duncan Fuller Richard Wilson
<p>14. Managing/co-ordinating network</p>		co-ordination group Tom Wakeford Charlotte Flower Carola Addington Sarah Madden Jasber Singh Duncan Fuller

5. Options for structure

The small group starting discussing the option papers circulated and there was some discussion indicating unresolved tensions regarding the purpose, remit and membership of the PPFC; and the link between the principles of participatory practice and the structure/ 'standing orders' (agreed governance principles) for that structure. Some felt our commitment to include makes us unique, others that similar networks exist. It was agreed to live with these tensions for now.

The outcome of this discussion was a decision tree and this was presented to the group in plenary. It was stressed that any decision on structure reached would be for a short (2 year) period not set in stone and reviewed annually.

1. Do we continue as PPFC?

Do we continue as PPfC or do people at this workshop continue to further the aims and objectives by working with and through over existing networks?

A show of hands indicated that approximately a three quarters majority wished to continue the PPFC. Much of our work might be in partnership with other networks. Who are these networks? PPFC must own the activities if we work in partnership?

2. Who will be part of the core groups?

If we continue, then do we have people who are willing to take on the core work of sustaining the network? The coordinating group would probably require quarterly meetings by phone or F2F, with a commitment that travel costs would be resourced as best they could.

A few names were put forward subject to finalising the structure (see Action Points for final composition). There may be others not present willing to be involved.

3. What structure? Incorporated or unincorporated?

Any structure must be capable of handling money. Should the network be an incorporated or unincorporated body? The former costs (£500) to set up but is straightforward – it protects the coordinating group from liability for debts incurred.

The consensus was to be unincorporated as this could be achieved that day, and to incorporate as and when activities or funding sources require it.

4. Cooperative, voluntary organisation or charity?

Should we be a cooperative, voluntary organisation or charity? The cooperative option was not recommended by the small group as it requires formal face to face voting on decisions which is not practical for a UK network. The charity option was not recommended by the small group as it has considerable administrative and accounting burdens (although more so in England and Wales than Scotland) and rules out any political activity – however there are significant tax breaks. The voluntary organisation option was recommended.

The consensus was to accept the recommendation although some noted that we have to decide where we register ourselves (England/Wales/Scotland)

5. Membership?

The small group recommended that regardless of the legal structure set up, cooperative, inclusive and participatory principles for the governance of the group should be adopted. Members are currently those on the mailing list, but all should be asked to 'join' and accept our common principles, aims and objectives (see the Greek temple from the activities session). Decisions taken by the coordinating group should be checked with the members.

There was agreement on this and action for the coordinating group to take this forward. There was debate over whether members should be individuals or organisations. This was unresolved, although it was suggested that if organisations joined, all individuals using PPFC must sign up to our shared principles. This is to be worded in the constitution/governing agreement and comments on this subject must be directed to the coordinating group.

6. Governing agreement?

The small group recommended that the governing agreement be adopted as a standard constitution once edited for specific content by the coordinating group.

This was agreed.

Some comments that were raised in the start up session:

- Plan dates ages in advance
- Interactive web resource useful
- Linking networks that exist separately as focus either by subject or by region
- Resourcing a neutral yet stable admin base
- What makes PPFC distinct? Focus on policy and practice?
- Need to plan for succession – attention to more available funding

6. Final action points:

6.1: Report of the meeting: Charlotte to co-ordinate this as before, to be produced as soon as possible

6.2: communiqué of this meeting to be sent to all on PPfC mailing list; Charlotte to draft and check with new co-ordinating group. To be sent out within a week of the meeting.

6.3: 1-2 page summary of the PPfC, what we hope to do and how. To be produced by co-ordinating group, by Christmas

6.4: first meeting/teleconference of the co-ordinating group. Would be good to have one line from each of the activities groups for this first meeting

6.5: we need a minute that this meeting agreed that the volunteers for the co-ordinating group were accepted by the wider group as the co-ordinating group (Annex D)

6.6: Co-ordinating group need to finalise the constitution by end Dec 05 and enable money to be transferred (if this cannot be done, could we use an intermediary organisation? Or delay the handover from Oxfam?)

6.7: co-ordinating group needs to make a proposal about membership (and the idea of fees?)

6.8: email to current mailing list about membership

Annex A.1: Options for Participatory Practitioners for Change (PPfC) beyond 2005

There was broad agreement at the previous Retreat about the need for some kind of organisation to continue beyond November 2005. The two options below are therefore presented as “straw people” for us to knock down in our efforts to develop a programme that as many of us as possible can throw our energies behind.

Option 1: A “trade association” of facilitators

This option would continue the PPfC network as it is now, probably with a wider group involved than at present. The group would promote good practice in participatory processes to policy-makers as well as providing mutual support and ideas-sharing between its members.

Discussions to date about this option have flagged up that the ‘association’ would need to be inclusive, membership open to practitioners working across different sectors and with different people and communities. It would be shared principles and values that act as the core ‘glue’, rather than particular tools and techniques. However, part of the purpose would be about addressing issues of quality and standards, without developing a top down model of what should be done, or organising the ‘association’ in a way that would require individuals to take exams, qualifications, etc.

The main advantages of this model is that it will require less funds (than option 2 below), and experience of previous meetings suggest that it could attract interested facilitators to occasional meetings, maybe paying per event. What it wouldn’t do, would be reach out beyond participation practitioners (see *Inclusivity* paper).

Option 2: A grassroots-led alliance

A PPfC-inspired alliance would work towards participatory democracy being taken from an experimental phase – based around localised experiments and top-down consultations - to the beginnings of a grassroots-led collective with influence at the national scale and beyond. By drawing together a diverse range of citizens who share a passion for social justice a post-PPfC alliance could deepen the involvement of groups marginalised from political process and become a catalyst to transform the structures and processes of decision-making into ones that are designed to be accountable from the bottom-up.

The alliance would aim to bring people who have been part of participatory initiatives together in an organisation that could be managed as limited liability company (see Diagram 1). It would be run by a collective (referred to in the *draft Governing Agreement* “Lead Group”) that included people who have played diverse roles in participatory processes; for example, those who have become involved after being contacted through the electoral roll, as community group members, as facilitation team members, or by being members of staff in commissioning and policy-maker organisations. Such a collective decision-making structure would break down barriers that some participatory processes erect between different categories of participant and thus ensure that each member is valued according to what they could contribute rather than their social or professional status.

A PPfC-inspired alliance would be distinctive in that it will embody a reversal of conventional power structures based on hierarchies. The alliance would slowly build the critical mass whereby it would begin to make a participatory democracy a reality. Streets of Growth in Bow, East London, and the Southall Black Sisters provide UK-based models of building movements based on solidarity among, and with, oppressed groups. Internationally, the International Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS, has used similar principles over the last few years (www.icw.org).

Linking to political change

PPfC members already have contacts with diverse groups of people involved a wide range of participatory initiatives. These have covered a broad spectrum of subject areas, most of which are of urgent policy concern to decision-makers in the UK. Yet few participatory projects have either the human or financial resources to allow participants to build strategies whereby decision-makers could become more accountable over longer time-scales or over a wider geographical area than on those which the particular project is focussed.

We estimate that by involving existing members of PPfC, together with people with whom they have worked, we could aim to involve a hundred people over the next year - including people from grassroots communities, facilitators and funding/policy institutions – in forming a network that could begin have an impact greater than the sum of what individual community initiatives could achieve on their own.

With the resources it had built up (see draft principle 4) we would aim to help individuals and organisations change the structures that currently block effective participation in government, non-governmental organisations and - though this is a more complex challenge - corporations. As a collective, its activities would be conducted according to principles that would continually be refined based on how the action-learning cycle led us to interpret our core values in new ways.

Practical first steps

Diagram 2 describes a range of possible activities for a post-PPfC network during its first year (also see *Practicalities* paper). The 4th Retreat is a perfect opportunity to flesh out these options, as well as adding, deleting or revising them.

A number of organisations already exist that share PPfC's aims and can contribute to the impact of a future movement. In the UK one of these is Involve, which has extensive links to policy-makers, participation specialists in academia and the field, but limited direct contact with grassroots initiatives. By contrast, a post-PPfC alliance could develop its own identity as a coalition of grassroots initiatives, which seek greater linkage to policy processes. Other organisations that might, by encouraging their staff/members/beneficiaries to join, become linked with the network include Oxfam UK, the UK Participation Network, the UK Reflect Network and a range of community-based initiatives such as Streets of Growth.

The PPfC-inspired alliance would prioritise the inclusion of oppressed and marginalised groups above all. Membership would be free and open to all, but with a donation requested from those who feel they can afford it. Along with draft principle 4 (see *Practicalities* paper) these donations would fund our core costs, in particular the involvement of individuals or groups that would otherwise be excluded by the cost of travel to meetings, child-care or lost wages.

Membership would be for individuals only, but organisations would be invited to support the alliance's work, but without this giving them any automatic rights to influence the decision-making process, nor would it normally be appropriate for their logos to be used on publicity materials. Within three years we expect that the network would have become self-sustaining its own core funding and have a growing active membership in UK and, hopefully, abroad.

Towards long-term transformation

The alliance would work towards envisage a gradual transformation of the structures and processes of governance in the UK, and abroad. Ultimately, and at a more fundamental level, a PPfC-inspired alliance would slowly introduce a new political vocabulary, based on mutual interdependence rather than competitive individualism.

(Tom - with inputs from Richard, Jasber, Peter, Kate G, Kate L, Charlotte and Maitrisara).

Diagram 1: ideas for different elements of a possible post-PPfC structure

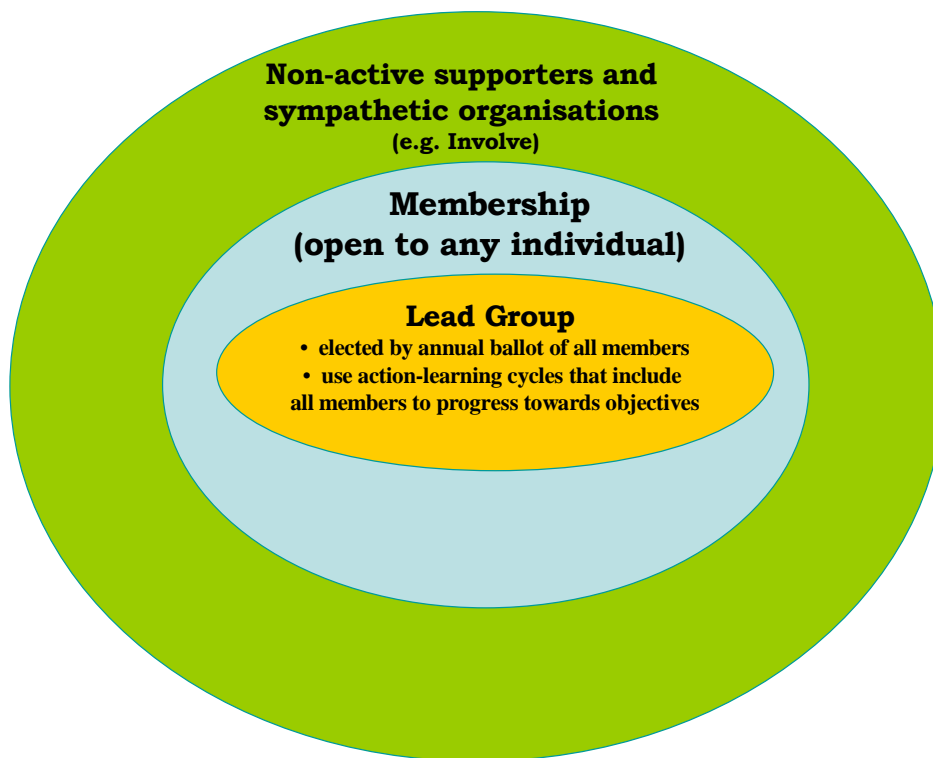
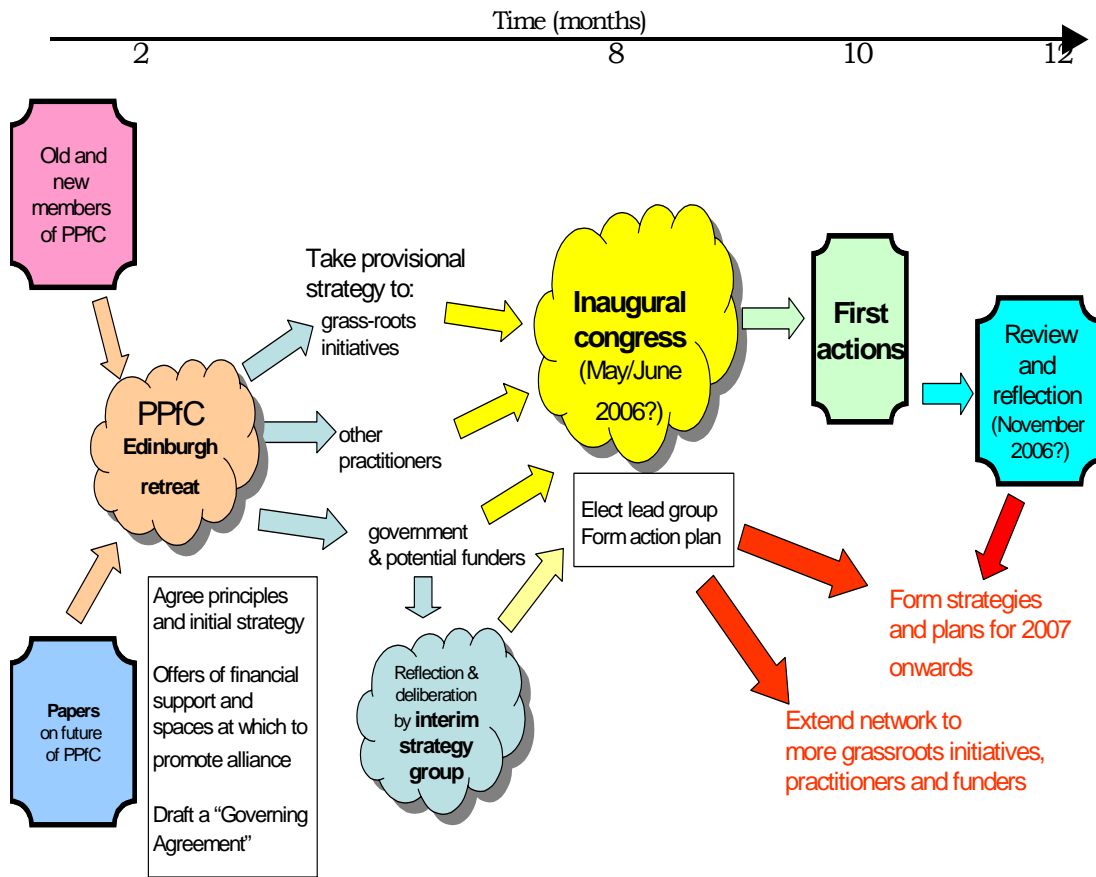


Diagram 2: the first year in the building of a PPfC-inspired alliance



Annex A.2: Practicalities for a post-PPfC network

Learning lessons

Hundreds of participatory and community empowerment type initiatives have taken place in the last decade in the UK and abroad. Yet, despite enthusiasm in communities for a bigger role in decisions, the impact of individual initiatives is being diffused by a political system that actively suppresses the informed perspectives that could transform the quality of our democratic system. Individual initiatives are often too under-resourced to achieve wider impacts. On other occasions they have fallen victim to attempts by those in power merely to be seen to consult, contributing to a wider global trend in post-Cold War decision-making that has been called a “tyranny of participation”. The phrase is partly used to describe the way in which institutions in the UK such as councils, health trusts and central government tend to prescribe the kinds of issues that can be discussed and then restrict the way in which the conclusions of such processes might be used for change.

Decision-making is widely perceived to be just as frustratingly remote as it had been previously. In the last few years it has become clear that some extremist forces, which lack any commitment to social justice, or even peace, are exploiting these frustrations. This is particularly as evidenced by the documented rise of BNP activity in parts of Northern England, East London, the midlands and East Anglia. Alienation and disengagement in deprived minority ethnic communities has also seen small and isolated activities from extremist groups.

Arguing for a basic human right

Early unions primarily used the economic muscle of their mass membership to strengthen their negotiating position with the powerful. Our alliance of people involved in participatory democracy will have the same resource at our disposal that contributed to the success of civil rights movements such as the Suffragettes, the racial justice campaigns of the 1970s, the Greenham Common women of the 1980s and the road-protesters of the 1990s – the basic human right to actively participate in the shaping the decisions that affect our lives.

Unlike the early unions, people involved in participatory initiatives (unless part of large organisations such as ActionAid or Oxfam) tend to be isolated and under-funded, making it difficult to achieve sufficient critical mass to bring about change. Most funding for community dialogue is strictly time-limited, which leaves those who have attempted to facilitate empowering processes unable to help build the capacity among local communities that is necessary to bring about long-term changes in the area. This in turn leads to frustration among community participants at the lack of opportunity to continue the work they began. The failure of past participatory initiatives to influence the policy process has been a direct consequence of their failure to build long-term connections of solidarity and practical action between participants both within local communities and more widely across the UK.

On the few occasions where continued funding is available initiatives can begin to achieve more lasting change. For example, following a community jury East Lancashire, some PPfC members have experimented with the building of a continuing dialogue with members of the jury that also brings members of a wider community on board.

Initiatives that attempt to build longer-term and wider processes of change inevitably encounter numerous obstacles and make mistakes. Learning from these and the similar experiences of others will be vital for a PPfC-inspired alliance to succeed. A recent example is the UK Reflect network (Reflect = Regenerated Freirean Literacy through empowering community techniques).

Reflect UK

Drawing on combination of approaches to adult education pioneered by Paulo Freire and participatory tools described by development academics such as Robert Chambers, Reflect-Action began within ActionAid programmes outside the UK in the late 1990s. In 1997, ActionAid organised useful training in Reflect Action (R-A) approaches for UK groups and some work has been developed in Wales, Oxford and most recently Sheffield. Trainers with experience from Nepal and El Salvador have contributed particularly valuable input. ActionAid itself only ever had a limited extent to which it could fund projects within the UK and has thus had little role in funding R-A activities. This suited UK R-A practitioners who did not want to relate to ActionAid as a funder, but rather as a partner. However, some members of the network feel ActionAid have underestimated the need for following up their initiation of the UK network and underestimated the importance of investing in a partnership with the UK R-A practitioners. The network is currently lacking a sense of cohesion, direction and follow through and communication systems are not functioning very effectively. Despite this, there have been some successful meetings and events and some networking with other REFLECT practitioners both in Europe and in the South.

We can certainly hope to learn from the past attempts at building a movement around participatory practice, but this will itself require some careful planning, facilitation and sensitivities, particularly around issues of power and equality.

Some practical principles that might guide a PPfC-inspired alliance

In addition to the more philosophical principles that were drafted in 2004 at PPfC's Charney Manor meeting (see attached list), some practical working principles of conduct for the new alliance might include the following.

1. All members will constantly work to ensure that **potentially marginalised voices** within and outside the network are encouraged and acted upon where appropriate.
2. The latest **finances**, including current and future projections, will be made clearly presented at every meeting.
3. A fundraising approach will be adopted so that **dependency on a single funder** will be avoided (see 4 and 5).

4. Members who are applying to donors for funds for participatory projects will be obliged **contribute at least 1% of their income** from the project to the alliance's core funds, unless special circumstances agreed with the Lead Group.
5. People who are already engaged professionally in participatory projects should not receive **an income from the network** unless they spend over a quarter of their time (50 days a year?) directly on core work of the network
6. The role of **spokesperson(s)** for the network will be undertaken in rotation between its Lead Group members.
7. Decisions on advocacy regarding particular issues should be devolved as much as possible to **local community initiatives** in which the particular issue is relevant and there has been some grassroots-led participation, if such exist.
8. Decisions will be taken by a majority vote of the Lead Group (or of the whole membership), with **minority views recorded and respected**.

Any suggestions for any more?

(Tom with input from Jasber and Maitrisara).

Annex A.3: Inclusivity: Why we need to include people who are not practitioners

A key aim of PPfC is to help reverse the current powerlessness that affects oppressed groups in the UK. This is clear to anyone who has been involved in PPfC or heard about us. Everyone on our “future for the PPfC” group has agreed, in principle, that any post-PPfC organisation should include people that have been “participants” in the initiatives in which we are, or have been, involved. Some of the group have expressed concern about how practical this will be in the short term. A useful thought-experiment might be to imagine a future organisation that only was able to involve participatory practitioners.

In our everyday participatory practice many of us come across people who are frustrated that current political structures don't allow the participatory processes in which they have been involved to influence decision-making. But do these people, who have no professional role in setting up or facilitating formal participatory process, have a vital role in a movement that is trying to build more bottom-up models of decision-making? We would argue that such people are an essential part of the legitimacy of any such movement.

“We're not apathetic, we're frustrated!”

To explain dropping voter turnout in UK elections, some commentators talk about public “apathy”. Yet PPfC'ers know from numerous projects among oppressed groups across the UK, that many people do not turn out to vote because they hold the political system in such low regard that they make an active choice to spend their time doing something else.

On our “future for the PPfC” group one person pointed out that when people in the communities with which they worked had not asked to be involved in anything at the national scale, it seemed odd (maybe even unparticipatory!) for the PPfC push it. This comments raises some fundamental issues about challenging power and oppression that people might want to think about before the Retreat.

Anyone with the time might like to look at the literature about the successful struggles for human rights during the last two centuries. Case studies include the suffragettes (UK), Landless Movement (Brazil), the early trade union movement (UK) or the civil rights/anti-racist movement.

In each case, real progress was only achieved through the mutual solidarity shown between those with least rights and few resources (e.g. most women, the landless, low-waged factory workers, black and other minority ethnic groups) and those who experienced less oppression (e.g. middle class women, urban elites and whites). Yet, if a PPfC'er had time-travelled to run a participatory workshop among the oppressed in the early days of any of these movements, it seems unlikely that they'd have received a united cry of “yes, we must work with sympathetic and resource rich professionals to form a national movement to end our oppression”.

Collectivism on many scales

What many PPfC'ers have found is that processes that have attempted to link local communities to regional or national processes do require a level of resources far greater than those required to be inclusive at a local level. There may also be differences that arise from the kinds of issues that PPfC'ers discuss at a local level.

Those involved in participation around a future street design may not need to be made aware of the national/international policy-dimensions of their work in the same way as those working on GM foods or alcohol and illegal drug use, for example.

If we accept the arguments above, then the biggest challenge for the Retreat becomes thinking of ways of both devising practices that can give people who are not participation professionals a meaningful role in the PPfC's future activities, and, just as importantly, sharing good practice of how we can overcome practical barriers to people's involvement in national level processes. Examples include - sending people their tickets rather than expecting them to claim back afterwards, flexible offers of childcare costs or creche, compensation for time spent off work and dates that respect people's work/leisure commitments.

Tom (though no claims to originality).

Annex B: PPfC Principles, edited after the November 05 meeting

1. People are experts in their lives – others learn from them.
2. Participatory work tries to include everyone relevant to the activity. Participants try to find those who need to be involved and to include voices and ideas that may not normally be heard.
3. In good participatory work people take ownership of the process (using their analysis, their logic and their words) that is developed together with others from many different backgrounds.
4. Participatory work follows cycles of learning – each step helps decide on the next step.
5. Participatory work requires people to be self-reflective. Practitioners continuously examine and develop their practice.
6. Participatory work is rigorous and ethical. Participants continually check their work and design ways of testing the process and the findings.
7. Participatory work should lead to action.
8. Good participatory work identifies the role of power in relationships and seeks to lead to empowerment of those disadvantaged by the existing situation.

Annex C: latest version of Guidelines for Commissioners (thanks to John Rowley and Maitrisara)

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT A GUIDE FOR THOSE PLANNING AND COMMISSIONING PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS

Most organisations have had experiences where a new development or change has not been welcomed by those affected by it. It is clear that it is more effective to involve the people affected by the change from the beginning. Many organisations are now required, more than ever before, to have conducted a consultation with their stakeholders before a new project or action plan is designed.

Concerns arise: will it take much longer? Does it cost much more? How will conflicts between groups be resolved?

The concerns don't have to become real.

Experienced members of the Participatory Practitioners for Change have drawn up a checklist and some guidance notes to make it easier to commission good community involvement projects.

The notes are arranged in four parts: principles, process, rewards and resources. There are ten questions in boxes. The more often you can answer Yes to the questions the more likely it is that the participatory process will be successful.

Some principles of good participatory work.

All participatory work should respect a few key principles. First, local people are experts in their own lives and others should expect to learn from them. Second, everyone should expect to learn during genuine participatory work. The first mistake an outsider can make is to start community level work thinking they know what they will find. Third, those engaged in participatory processes have to work actively to include people, especially those who are often missed out.

Following the principles leads to designing a good process.

A good process

A participatory process has to be designed to make it easy for those involved to learn. This means arranging a number of steps where those involved can stop and decide on the next steps; the whole process cannot be designed from the start.

Flexibility

This means that the process needs to include some flexibility so that work can be adjusted as the situation becomes clearer and new things are learned.

Time to think

There has to be time to reflect and check on findings and explore more deeply some of the issues that emerge.

1. Does the consultation process contain time to think and flexibility so that work can be modified as it goes along?

Ways of sharing the learning

There has to be time to share the results with participants and key stakeholders so that everyone is informed about what is going on and what the important issues are. Some results will need to be interpreted by those who were present and some discussions or meetings may be necessary and a better way of explaining the work than a written report.

Consultation fatigue

Most complaints of consultation fatigue are not actually about being consulted but about not knowing what happened as a result of the consultation. In a good process it is very clear how people's views are to be used, how they will influence decision making and how the results will be fed back to the participants and stakeholders.

2. Does the consultation process contain methods for feeding back to participants and for sharing the findings with key stakeholders?

Managing the process

A genuinely participatory initiative normally works well when there is someone that will guide the process within the organisation. This person may already have witnessed a good participatory process and can help others to adjust to the ways of working and making use of the findings.

3. Is there someone who will support and promote the consultation process?

Allowing for greater scope

Participatory consultations may raise issues that are outside the area that are covered by the organisers or outside their expectations. A good process can make use of these unexpected ideas and link expressed issues to potential service providers.

For example; a consultation originally focussed on health identified transport as key barrier preventing people from reaching good food outlets and exercise centres.

4. Will it be possible to involve people in different areas outside the initial brief of the process?

Designing a good process leads to the rewards of good participation.

The Rewards of good participation

Leading to action

Good participatory processes lead to action and the people involved can move on from assessment to doing something practical.

5. Does the process include the intention of promoting action and change at community level?

Raised skills and confidence bring lasting change
Involving local people in a consultation can involve training and raising skills. Being involved improves confidence and people often continue to be involved in other initiatives. There can be lasting changes in engagement. Future consultations become easier because of the training and empowerment.

6. Does the process involve local people and help to build their skills?

Fewer complaints
If people are effectively engaged in a consultation process there are far fewer complaints both during the process and when decisions are implemented. This saves time and money in not having to deal with protests and grievances.

Greater ownership
People who are properly involved in a participatory process feel far higher levels of ownership in projects that emerge from the consultation even where the work is carried out by others.

More inclusive
A good participatory process will identify and include people who are usually excluded from consultations. The wider participation will ensure that the needs of more people are included in the assessment.

Who is hard to reach?

People who have been involved in a good participatory process tend to stop saying that some people are Hard to Reach and start to say that some assistance and services are hard to reach for some people.

New ideas, new information
A good participatory consultation identifies new ideas and unearths new issues that are important to people in the community. The openness of the people leading the consultation and the methods used allow more ideas to be heard and more people to be taken notice of.

7. Does the consultation have the capacity to cope with unexpected findings?

Easier to deal with difficulties earlier.
More sensitive information and more differences of opinion are collected in a participatory process that pays attention to more people. The process allows difficult ideas and differences of opinion to be dealt with at an early stage rather than finding them an obstacle much later in the project.

Resources

A good process requires skilled and experienced facilitation. It is worth taking time to identify good trainers and facilitators. More consultancy days may be required for a good participatory process than for a more conventional consultant-driven survey.

The results are likely to be delivered at the same time but a participatory process will save time and money later because it has been more thorough and engaged the people who are affected and those who will be necessary to support further action.

8. Can you find good facilitators for this process, including sources to search, clear criteria and methods for selection?

The most important resource is likely to be the time and attention of participants and senior staff.

9. Are the key stakeholders informed about this initiative and have they got time allocated to learning about the process and about the findings?

It is important to check with other initiatives in the area in order to avoid duplication of effort and to build on other community level work done. .

10. Can you identify similar participatory initiatives that have happened recently in the same area or may be planned in the near future?

Annex D: Minute from PPfC meeting, November 2005

The participants attending the Participatory Practitioners for Change meeting, 9th and 10th November 2005, at St Colms in Edinburgh, agreed that a small co-ordinating group should take forward the development and planning of an independent network, Participatory Practitioners for Change. At the meeting the following volunteered to be part of that group:

Carola Addington
Kate Lonsdale
Charlotte Flower
Jasber Singh
Peter Bryant
Tom Wakeford
Richard Wilson
Duncan Fuller

It was also agreed by the participants of the meeting that an invitation should go out to all on the PPfC membership list to join the co-ordinating group².

The participants of the meeting have asked the co-ordinating group to:

- explore issues outlined in section 5 of the Nov 05 meeting report, around establishing the organisation (finalise governing agreement, resolve issues around membership, where we should register ourselves)
- present back to the membership concrete proposals on the above and with membership approval implement those proposals
- co-ordinate the various sub-groups
- explore and follow up funding options for the organisation

² That has since been done, and Scott Jones has joined the co-ordinating group