

Practical learning for stronger voices:

Supporting the development of confident, inclusive and effective third sector representatives

“I want to understand how decisions are made and get my finger on the pulse.”¹

What is ‘How Your Place Works’?

‘How Your Place Works’ (HYPWs) is a knowledge-based active learning programme that complements the skills and abilities required for effective third sector strategic representation. HYPWs is a practical approach to helping people find their way through the increasingly complex maze of decision-making structures; to establish how and where they can best influence and how to get their voices heard. It can provide a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges that decision-making structures, partnership working and representation bring. It is a tool for inspiring and supporting people to commit to playing a more active part in influencing and decision making.

“The nature of the whole set up is so unclear – not anyone’s fault but it means that the leap from theory to practice is still daunting.”²

This guide aims to provide an introduction to developing a HYPWs programme. It covers the following aspects:

- Background and policy context
- Key principles
- Developing and delivering HYPWs
- Links and resources

¹ How Your City Works, Sheffield
² as above

Background

HYPWs builds on initiatives developed by Community Empowerment Networks across the country as part of their remit to support third sector representation on local strategic partnerships.

Example: Hull Community Network³ – How Your City Works

A ten-week informal course developed by the Community Network staff teams, together with the University of Hull to enable residents of Hull to come together to learn more about local decision-making structures and how to influence them.

www.hullcvs.co.uk

Policy context

HYPWs is a tool that contributes to two key policy agendas:

1. The involvement of the third sector in partnership working with a particular emphasis on effective representation on local strategic partnerships
2. Community empowerment and the drive to promote active citizenship and responsive services

These policies have been most recently articulated in:

- The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act and the Local Democracy, Economic Development and construction Bill;
- The nation *Action Plan for Community Empowerment: Building on Success* and the Empowerment White Paper *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power*.

“There are a number of issues that affect people’s attitude to participating in local decision making. These include understanding of local government, whether people have the time and resources to participate and whether people feel getting involved is going to make a difference.”⁴

³ Sadly Hull Community Network is no longer in operation; contact Hull CVS

⁴ *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment*, CLG, October 2007

The commitment to the introduction of participatory budgeting in all local authority areas by 2010 brings an additional impetus to making opportunities available for people to understand how the system works.

Why do it?

Delivering a programme of 'How Your Place Works' can support a number of objectives:

- Providing third sector representatives with the underpinning knowledge and understanding of local government and partnership structures required for effective strategic representation and partnership working.
- Increasing the pool of potential third sector representatives to engage in partnership working and participate in governance including the voice of young people and people from groups that are currently under-represented.
- Strengthening neighbourhood working by equipping local activists and community organisations to contribute to planning and delivery of services at a local level.
- Building relationships and understanding between agencies, the third sector and communities.
- Increasing networking within the third sector.
- Supporting community engagement as set out in:
 - Local Area Agreement priorities for Stronger Communities
 - Comprehensive Area Assessments
 - The Duty to Involve

Example

How Your City Works is a six-session course explaining the structures and processes involved in regenerating the city. This would be of benefit to those who are beginning to be involved with their communities as volunteers or paid workers, but also to those with some experience who want to make more of an impact, or wish to represent their communities at a different level.

improving local partnerships

Programme

- Guest speakers from key organisations
- Discussions about community involvement
- Networking with people from other areas, groups and networks
- Sharing experience and ideas
- Opportunities to attend meetings of Sheffield First etc.

Aim: To encourage people from the voluntary, community and faith sector to take part in local and/or city-wide partnerships and decision-making boards.

By the end of the course, participants should be:

- more informed on current issues relating to regeneration and community development
- more familiar with the different structures and bodies operating in Sheffield and South Yorkshire and how they relate to each other
- more aware of how power and decision making works in the city
- clearer on how to engage with decision making in the city and what support is available
- able to understand the role of the VCF sector in regenerating Sheffield.

www.offer.org.uk>How Your City Works

Key principles

In order to support the development of stronger community voices, the HYPWs approach is rooted in the values and practices of community development and informal adult learning. HYPWs is:

- **Community based:** rooted within the third sector and building on existing partnerships, networks and relationships of trust
- **Learner centered:** recognising what individuals bring with them in terms of knowledge and experience and building on that
- **Learning for change:** learning about how your place works is not just about learning about existing models and structures; it is also about how to make your place work for you – how to question, influence and work with others for change.

Stages in developing HYPWs	
1. Getting started	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying roles Bringing partners together Clarifying objectives and identifying target group
2. Developing the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning the content Developing learning materials and activities
3. Delivering the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach and recruitment Facilitation Practicalities

Getting started

SUMMARY

- A local third sector infrastructure body that supports community engagement will be best placed to take the lead.
- Establish a steering group that can bring local knowledge and experience to the table.
- Clarify why you are developing a HYPWs programme and what you hope to achieve. Keep It Simple.
- Allow a reasonable lead-in time of at least three months in order to engage with local partners and shape the programme to reflect the local context.

The **lead organisation** – or community host – will have community empowerment as a core objective. They will bring local networks and relationships of trust to the table. They will be able to outreach and recruit for HYPWs. They can organise a local venue, refreshments and help with transport and childcare. They may already have experience of facilitation and training delivery. They will follow up and support participants at the end of the programme.

Bringing together a **steering group** can provide a useful sounding board to ensure that the programme is a useful reflection of the partnership context and the current environment of community engagement. Membership might include:

- HYPWs lead organisation
- other third sector organisations that are working at that spatial level
- community learning providers
- local authority and agency community engagement and partnership liaison workers.

Clarity: The HYPWs approach relates to a complex and changing field of activity. It is important to be specific about why you are undertaking it and what you hope to achieve. Keep it coherent and manageable.

Identify the target group of participants and the scope or layer of partnership working and governance that you want to cover. Be clear where the opportunities for representation and influence are located; these will vary according to the local government and partnership structures that are operating in your place.

Who does what?

There are a number of different roles involved. These can be delivered in house and/or commissioned. This will depend on the context and the availability of resources and expertise:

Research: making sure that the information content is up-to-date and relevant

Writing: putting together a training pack that includes programme outline, aims and objectives, learning outcomes, session plans, learning materials handouts and worksheets

Delivery: a combination of local knowledge and facilitation skills

Learner support and follow-up: supporting individuals and networks; capturing impact

Evaluation: an independent and objective overview of the impact of the programme

Key considerations

- How has the need for the programme been established? Why is it relevant and to whom? Has the target group of participants been identified? Why might they want to participate?
- Are the aims and objectives of the programme clear and relevant?
- What is the central focus and boundary of 'place'? The region? The local authority? The local strategic partnership? The ward? The parish? The district? The neighbourhood?
- Where are the main centres of power and influence? How is the governance of this place structured?
- Which are the key agencies and structures that are driving service delivery in this place?
- What are the priorities and issues that are 'local' to this place?
- What are the genuine opportunities for participation and representation that are available in this place?

Developing the programme

SUMMARY

- Plan the content to reflect the local context, scope of 'place' and circumstances of the participants.
- Make contact with places where a programme has already been running; build on existing experience.
- Develop a variety of learning materials, activities and information resources that are specific to the context; encourage learning that is shared and fun to take part in.
- Allow a lead-in time of at least three months in order to plan the content, recruit the learners, book in contributors and make the practical arrangements for delivery.

Content

The content of the programme will vary according to the place, the routes to influence and the target group of participants. A HYPWs steering group can be used to brainstorm the key elements of 'place'; they can also identify the

relevant contacts within the structures. The experience of other successful programmes can be drawn on in order to produce your learning programme. Some links are provided in this document. There will be more out there!

HYPWs can be designed for use at any level of local government or partnership working:

Place	Partnerships	Routes to influence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single Tier Authorities • Two-tier Authorities • Town and Parish Councils • Area Committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City Region • Local Strategic Partnership • Neighbourhood Management Partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Community Strategy • Local Area Agreement • Multi Area Agreement • Neighbourhood Charter

Example

The Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum deliver information sessions to help de-mystify the region and the new governance arrangements, explain the jargon and clarify how it all works.

How our Region works – the Voluntary and Community Sector, the region, the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Forum: exploring the links.

- Do you understand how governance structures work at the regional level?
- Where does the voluntary and community sector fit in?
- What does the Regional Forum do?

www.regionalforum.org.uk>conferences and events

Existing successful programmes include a combination of the following elements:

improving local partnerships

Knowledge and information

- What people know already and are bringing with them
- Relevant government policy on regeneration, neighbourhoods, empowerment etc
- Local structures and processes for decision making, resource allocation and service delivery
- The role and contribution of the third sector

Core issues

- Partnership working
- Representation, participation and accountability
- Equalities, diversity and inclusion
- Power and influence
- Sustainable development

How Your Place Works – strategic partnership working

1.	<p>The big picture: An overview of the policy context on local government, partnership working and community empowerment. What programmes and activities are delivering this in our place? What opportunities and challenges does this present?</p>
2.	<p>Local structures (1) – the local authority: The functions and structures of local government. How do the different structures relate to each other? What is a local area agreement? Where and how are decisions made?</p>
3.	<p>Local structures (2) – partnership: The functions and structures of the local strategic partnership. What is partnership working and does it make a difference? How do you influence the LSP?</p>

4.	<p>The third sector: An overview of the sector, its role and contribution. What is the power and influence of the sector and how can it best be used? What are the opportunities and challenges for the future?</p>
5.	<p>Participation, partnership and representation: An exploration of representative and participative democracy. Who sets local agendas and makes decisions? How do they represent us and how do we influence them? Where does accountability lie?</p>
6.	<p>Making our place work for us: Planning for the future. Where does power and influence lie? What do we want to influence and what will help us to do this? What have we learned and where do we want to go from here? Celebration of achievements.</p>

Learning materials and activities

There is a wealth of training packs and toolkits available to draw on. There are some suggestions at the end of this document. You will need to customise resources to make them specific to the 'place' being explored. Having fun is an important way of demystifying structures that may seem complicated and distant!

Examples

- **Visual images:** maps and jigsaws are useful to communicate the complexity and the dynamics of the world of partnership.
- **Games:** quizzes and bingo games can be used to share facts and figures about a place.
- **Guest contributors:** invite partner agencies and service deliverers to contribute to sessions. This provides good networking opportunities.
- **Case studies:** can form the basis for joint problem solving between residents and agencies.

- **Visits:** facilitate opportunities to observe decision making in action at relevant meetings and events.
- **Individual or group projects:** applying the learning and reporting back to the group.

Delivering the programme

SUMMARY

- Allow sufficient time and resources to reach and engage with the target group of participants.
- HYPWs is free of charge to participants.
- Use co-facilitators and a participatory approach to learning.
- Select the venue and the timings for the programme to suit local circumstances.

Outreach and recruitment of participants:

Reaching and engaging participants will need targeted outreach and personal contact in the first instance. Introductory taster sessions can help people get a clearer idea of what is on offer. Once the programme is up and running, word of mouth will contribute significantly to the future recruitment of participants.

HYPWs is offered FREE of CHARGE to participants. Help with transport and caring expenses is also provided.

Facilitation

In order to facilitate active learning and critical reflection, the programme is structured and facilitated in a participatory style. Using co-facilitators provides a variety of input and more personalised attention. This is particularly valuable in regard to the amount of information that HYPWs seeks to get across and the complexity of the landscape addressed.

“Active learning involves learning by doing and then learners reflecting on their activities so that they can develop knowledge and understanding from their own experiences. They identify review and summarise their learning and then apply it to new situations. Active learning also involves a dialogue and interaction with others.”⁵

⁵ *Citizenship through voluntary and community-based activities*, Quality Improvement Agency Post-16 citizenship support programme

Practicalities

The local context together with the circumstances of the target group of participants will influence practical considerations:

Venue: Accessible, welcoming and community based. Enough space for groupwork around tables and facilities for presentations from outside speakers.

Duration frequency and timing: The length of the programme, how often it happens and when it is delivered will have an impact on who can participate. Be flexible in your approach to striking a balance between the range of considerations; be informed by local knowledge and by feedback from participants. This will be particularly important in rural areas where communities are smaller and more dispersed.

Example: Leeds Voice - pREParation

A guide to the maze that is strategy, partnership working and decision making in Leeds. Short, snappy and practical workshops providing information, knowledge and skills needed to get involved in decision making:

- Community development and community involvement
- Decision making – who and how?
- Representation - impact and influence
- The Compact

Four units delivered over one full day and three half days.

www.leedsvoice.org.uk>training

What next?

SUMMARY

- Be prepared to offer signposting and follow-up support to participants
- Summarise and disseminate the learning from the programme to inform community engagement practice in your place.
- Track the longer term impact of HYPWs.

“It has helped me to put together the jigsaw and now I want to know more.”⁶

HYPWs will generate interest and ideas around further learning. This may require signposting to other providers or provide ideas for the development of follow on modules. The group may wish to continue as a network and this will require some initial support.

Example: Hull Community Network – How Your City Works graduates group

The graduates group is made up of people who have completed the Network’s ‘How Your City Works’ course. The group holds regular meetings which serve as both networking opportunities, a chance to share information and support, and a chance to hear from and question invited city leaders. Networking among graduates has also supported local community initiatives.

The learning and reflections of participants are a useful source of feedback for partners and agencies, reflecting the challenges that engagement presents as viewed from the ‘outside’. Discussions are a rich source of practical and constructive suggestions on how community engagement can be encouraged and made more effective – a menu of participation.

Tracking progression and longer term impact will enhance the learning from the programme. It will also provide evidence for the continuation of resources.

“My local Neighbourhood Watch is better organised, police liaison is more effective and I am on two new committees.”⁷

Key considerations:

- What other learning opportunities are available to develop the knowledge and skills required for partnership working?
- How will participants be supported to put their learning into practice?
- What resources will be made available to sustain networks and keep knowledge updated?
- How will the longer term impact be tracked?
- How will the learning from the programme be shared with wider partners and stakeholders?

⁶ How Your City Works, Sheffield

⁷ How Your City Works, Hull

Links and resources

Take Part Network

Active Learning for Active Citizenship evaluation

Includes: underpinning principles for active learning for active citizenship; learning experiences and case study examples; evaluation framework; model for mapping influence.

Take Part: The national framework for active learning for active citizenship:

A manual for practitioners and providers of learning programmes in citizenship skills for adults. Includes: values and principles of Take Part; planning a programme and putting it into practice; case studies.

Take Part – East Lincolnshire: Active citizenship in practice:

A guide that describes ongoing practice and learning in a rural setting.
www.takepart.org

National Empowerment Partnership in Yorkshire and the Humber

Active Citizens – Stronger Communities

Examples of community empowerment learning programmes. Includes: experiences of a range of agencies and networks that have developed or facilitated programmes such as How Your City Works and other useful models.

www.yhep.org.uk

Common Purpose

Local Links – developing active networks in local communities

A review of the pilot programme to improve neighbourhood networking, support, skills development and information sharing for local decision makers and active citizens in four Yorkshire areas. The review describes the approach taken and reviews the learning from the programme. Available as a download from:

www.jrf.org.uk

Participatory Budgeting Unit

Useful background documents and reference material on participatory budgeting including publications and resources. Some are about understanding how public budgets work. There is also a diagram of how local government is put together.

www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

London Civic Forum

How London Works – resources for active citizens

Information on different ways to get involved in playing an active part in London life. Includes fact sheets that describe the roles and functions of the governance structures for London with links to further information.

www.londoncivicforum.org.uk>How London Works

Urban Forum

How Your Council Works – a handy guide for community groups

A guide to how local councils work for anyone involved in, or interested in getting involved in, local community activity.

www.urbanforum.org.uk

Operation Black Vote

Who runs my city?

Maps out the key bodies that make up a city's governance, who runs them, how to make contact with them and examples of why you would seek to engage with them.

www.obv.org.uk

Volunteer Centre Southwark

Active Citizens Hub

Have produced a series of 'How to' leaflets and deliver a half-day programme: 'How Southwark Works – Understanding Public Services.'

www.volunteercentres.org.uk/Active-Citizens

Participatory training resources

Into the lions den: a practical guide to including women in regeneration.

What do men and women want: a practical guide to gender and participation

Oxfam UK Poverty Programme

www.oxfam.org/publications

Making community participation meaningful: a handbook for development and assessment.

Danny Burns, Frances Heywood, Marilyn Taylor, Pete Wilde and Mandy Wilson.
Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Democracy Cookbook: Doing politics with young people

The Electoral Commission

www.dopolitics.org.uk

improving local partnerships

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