

Introduction

Third sector representatives are members of third sector organisations (e.g. staff, trustees, volunteers or users) who represent the sector on multi-agency strategic partnerships or other decision-making bodies.

This document aims to assist the third sector address the roles and responsibilities which might be assigned to these representatives through outlining:

- background and policy context
- key issues to consider
- specific examples of practice in different local areas.

Background and policy context

The third sector is increasingly involved in the planning and delivery of services, working alongside public sector partners. As this role develops, and as the third sector becomes a key player at the partnership table, there is a need for clear, accountable and relevant representation.

Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities, Statutory Guidance (Department of Communities and Local Government, July 2008) states that “*it is essential that representatives from the local third sector ...are represented as part of the formal membership of the LSP and relevant sub groups*” and outlines the new duty to involve representatives of local people. A best practice framework for effective third sector participation in LSPs is offered in *Principles of Representation* (NAVCA, Department of Communities and Local Government and Office of the Third Sector, August 2008). These principles should be taken into account so that LSPs properly support third sector representation.

The challenge for the third sector is to put in place mechanisms for identifying appropriate and accountable representatives who reflect the demographic and social diversity of the local context, taking into account different dimensions e.g. age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class, and any other grounds for exclusion and discrimination.

Clearly agreed roles and responsibilities of representatives will be an important part of this.

The role of the representative

The role of third sector representatives on multi-agency strategic partnerships is likely to encompass the following:

- Raising the profile of the third sector in a way that highlights the value, diversity and contribution of the sector in relation to that partnership area.
- Being a voice for the sector and reflecting the range of views and experiences held by the sector.
- Influencing and, where necessary, challenging thinking and decisions made by the partnership e.g. discrimination and exclusion of marginalised groups to ensure a third sector perspective is taken into account.
- Contributing to the overall development and operation of the partnership to ensure it fulfils its purpose.

Key considerations

- What is the partnership's understanding of the role played by third sector representatives?
- What skills, experience and support will be required by representatives to play these roles?
- How will representatives be identified and mandated to play this role?
- What mechanisms are put into place to ensure appropriate representation that reflects the demographic and social diversity of the local context?

Example

RAISE (Regional Action in the South East) enables voluntary and community organisations in the South East to influence regional policy. In response to members' requests it has produced a toolkit on representation. This document details the various stages in the process

of representation. It is divided into five sections and includes information on selection processes, expectations of representatives, as well as a section to help representatives clarify who they are being asked to represent, and tips on how to do this effectively. For more information see: www.raise-networks.org.uk/toolkits

Key responsibilities and tasks

In order to perform the above roles, representatives are likely to be responsible for the following tasks:

- Preparing for partnership meetings and reading papers in advance.
- Regularly attending and taking an active part in partnership meetings.
- Maintaining an up-to-date knowledge of third sector interests and views through ongoing consultations with relevant groups, with active outreach to different equality sectors.
- Reporting and feeding back information from partnership meetings.
- Liaison and co-ordination with other representatives on the same partnership.
- Undertaking induction and training in support of this representational role, including training around equality and diversity practices.

Key considerations

- Is information available from the partnership regarding expectations and the time commitment required of representatives?
- What mechanisms are in place to enable representatives to consult and feed back to the sector in an appropriate and inclusive manner?
- What arrangements are in place if the representative is unable to make a particular meeting?
- What support and training is available to representatives?
- Will representatives receive any financial payment reimbursement?
- How will the impact of the work of the third sector representatives be measured and what criteria will be applied to assess inclusiveness and responsiveness to the diverse voice within the sector?

Example

Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum elect members to represent the sector at a wide range of partnerships across the city. They have produced a Representative Resource Pack which details the role of representatives and support available, as well as information on local structures and relevant policies. For more information see: www.cvsectorforum.org.uk/reprs

Code of conduct

A code of conduct for representatives may include the following:

- Representatives should ensure that their contact details are up-to-date and made readily available to groups/agencies with whom they will need to liaise.
- Representatives are expected to reflect the broader views of the third sector over and above the interests of their personal or organisation's view.
- Representatives should be aware of, and declare, potential conflicts of interests.
- Representatives should be accountable to those who have nominated or elected them to this role and should inform them immediately if they are no longer able to fulfil the role and/or attend meetings.

Key considerations

- What checks are in place to ensure that the representative is representing a diverse sector and not their own particular interests?
- What systems are in place for deputising for/replacing a representative when needed?

Example

Voscur in Bristol was originally set up to represent the interests of the voluntary and community sector at Bristol's Strategic Partnerships. There is a section on its website devoted to representation, and their Representation Principles provide a guide to how representatives should operate. For more information see: www.voscur.org/representation

improving local partnerships

This document was developed by Hasnah Sheriff on behalf of NAVCA. It has been equality proofed by the National Equality Partnership www.improvingsupport.org.uk/equality; email equality@wrc.org.uk.

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