



The Scottish Parliament

Participation Handbook

Background

This first Handbook, available also in hard copy, has been developed to offer guidance and practical help for Committees and Clerks in their task of reaching and engaging with a wider public, and in particular involving those groups and individuals who are not currently engaged in the political process.

Why has it been produced

During the first session of Parliament, a range of civic participation events took place but it was recognised that there was a need to reach a much wider selection of people, particularly those who are not connected to more formal civic society organisations. This takes time and energy and this Handbook offers practical suggestions on how to reach people and organise events so that our collective effort is well focused and participation enhanced.

Who is it for?

The Handbook is for Committees and Clerks who would like to extend their ideas on how to engage more marginalized groups. However it should also be of some help when organising any event. Even more formal meetings or conferences which are targeted at the professional or business community can be made more interactive, and a better dialogue created, through some of these considerations.

How it is organised

The Handbook is divided into 5 Sections, and contains examples and reference sheets which can be accessed for further information. Section 1 offers a basic introduction to participation.

Reaching people in the first place is one of the biggest challenges for staff under the pressure of time, and a number of suggestions for getting to more marginalised groups are outlined in Section 2.

Paying attention to some of the small practical details that enable better participation is as important as finding the right methods and this is covered in Sections 3 and 4.

Snapshots of a range of methods, covering small to large events are covered in Section Five.

We expect that more examples and contacts will be added in future editions.

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Handbook on Public Participation

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Section 1 Introduction

1.1 Participation - what do we mean?

In this Handbook, participation is viewed as an active relationship and dialogue between people and the state. It is not only gathering evidence and opinions but is an educative, discursive and inclusive process that has value in itself in building fuller citizenship. It is seen as a means of strengthening representative democracy rather than being in opposition to it, or offered as an alternative model. For further views on this see Arnstein's "ladder of citizen partnership" ([Ref1](#)) and Different Perceptions of the Public ([Ref 2](#))

Elected representatives have the authority and the mandate to make decisions on behalf of their constituents, but this authority is always contingent on their relationship with the electorate. In the UK there is a long history of participation from pressure groups, campaigns, lobbying or generally trying to influence elected politicians and have more say in decision making at both local and national level.

The innovative institutional structures and principles of the Scottish Parliament offer a framework for raising the level of participation and interaction with representatives. The purpose of this Handbook is to provide practical ways of turning this into effective practice.

1.2 Traps to Avoid

The bottom line as to whether we increase the participation of wider sections of Scottish society in the business of Parliament is about our own attitudes to the idea. Here are some common reactions:

- **“The general public is apathetic”**

We are all more interested in those things that affect our own lives. Stimulating interest in broader or abstract issues is not difficult but requires pre-work, educational input, working collaboratively with others, and using methods, that help to make links between people's lives and the issue under scrutiny.

- **“Some issues are too technical – people wouldn't understand”**

Participative practice has to include an educational element otherwise privileged access will be magnified. Asking people about technical issues without giving enough time to absorb information is a form of tokenism. We should not underestimate people's capacity to get to grips with complex issues if they are clearly presented.

- **“It raises people's expectations that we can't meet”**

Not if the context and parameters of any inquiry are clearly and honestly stated. Most people understand that their views will not be turned into policy overnight. Written and simply stated information on what will happen to their contribution, and how it will be dealt with should be given to all participants.

1.3 Who are we trying to engage, and how?

Creating a more level playing field

The groups that have been most involved with the Parliament so far have similar features. By definition, those people or groups who are not organised in the same way find it harder to communicate with us and us with them. As the more powerful partner, and in order to promote equality, we have to take responsibility for creating a more level playing field. The following are some of the main characteristics of organisations most involved with the Parliament.

- **Organised** – usually with a familiar management structure, a representative structure, network or branches, paid professional staff, and geared up to communicate with the Parliament.
So we have to be pro-active in reaching people through community based networks, going beyond the more formal organisations and building a relationship with this sector.
- **Conversant with our ‘language’** – they understand policy documents and the implications and details of legislation, political terms and the process of lobbying. They are IT literate and communicate via e-mail.
We need to use clearer, straightforward language and improve the ways in which we communicate and publicise inquiries etc.
- **Holding a body of specialised knowledge** as professional or academic organisations who have built up their particular expertise and can express this authoritatively using evidence or research
We have to show that we value the different types of knowledge that can be of equal importance in developing effective policies or legislation - based on experience or living in an area. ([Example 1](#))
- **Resourced** – usually financially secure funds for administration and training, policy officer staff, travel or producing professional material. There will be IT capacity and skilled staff to use it.
We can reduce the costs and other obstacles that prevent people from participating, and give people the information they need to be able to comment or give their views.
- **Have Power and Status** – they may employ many people, represent groups nationally, be within the academic community, invest heavily, or provide economic opportunities and will expect to be consulted.
We can visibly demonstrate our commitment to wider involvement through good participative practice – by giving respect and consideration to all people in their role as equal citizens.

1.4 Why? - The benefits of increased participation

The huge support, and the pressure, for the creation of the Scottish Parliament were for a different form of legislature in which the Scottish people had more say. However, there is no blue-print to follow in developing more active participation, and in many ways Scotland is in the forefront of a challenge that faces democracies throughout the world. This is something to be proud of but the fact that it is innovative and difficult also needs to be recognised.

There is a danger in becoming cynical or tokenistic about participation. In many ways encouraging active engagement is the only way to counter the disaffection with politics and politicians. So there is an imperative to wrestle with it, review and learn from our experience, such that it is “ *sincerely sought and the goal towards which our face is set*”.

The Main Benefits

- Members and parliamentary staff cannot be expected to know everything. Wider public participation increases the pool of knowledge to be drawn on and can provide detailed and specific evidence that experts often miss.
- By hearing from the wider population, more appropriate and effective policies and legislation are developed that have the support of people
- It influences but does not dictate decision making. Increasing the contact between people and MSP's in new ways strengthens the relationship between them.
- It turns the rhetoric into reality, visibly demonstrating our principles.
- It fundamentally promotes equal opportunities
- It provides opportunities that help people understand how the Parliament structures work through positive, concrete experiences. In the longer term, this can help to raise the level of people's political literacy in Scotland and create a more mature dialogue between politicians and the people.
- Lastly, by providing more and more people with a good experience of engaging in politics, we can begin to build a more positive image of the Scottish Parliament. [\(See quotes\)](#)

Section 2 How you can reach the wider public

2.1 Introduction

Many committees have been pro-active in reaching wider communities. This does mean extra work, and allowing more time.

The following suggestions are about using the contacts that exist more creatively and pro-actively, as well as thinking “laterally”, to make connections with the huge variety of networks and social interaction points that are available out there in the wider community. They offer gateways to more marginalised groups and can be utilised when wishing to plan an event, publicise a call for evidence, or when organising fact finding and reporter visits etc.

These gateways can be used for research purposes as well, but this would need to be planned with advice from Research Services, so that specific criteria can be drawn up before such groups are approached. Existing guidance for staff informs you about Data Protection Issues.

A Note on Communities

The most common idea of ‘community’ is people, who live in a particular street, housing scheme or village and all their different relationships and activities - sometimes called **communities of place**.

There are also groupings of people who share some common features, experiences or concerns and are considered **communities of interest**. These could be young people, minority ethnic or traveller communities, carers of disabled children etc.

Groups and people involved with these different communities are not always organised or resourced in the same way, as the more formal agencies and many are not linked into any formal network. This means:

- Developing and sharing our knowledge of the type of networks which operate at a more grassroots level and making links with them.
- Learning how best to connect directly or indirectly using others such as community based workers and contacts
- Thinking out of our “box”, drawing on local expertise, and using different methods which support participation and engagement

2.2 Getting to local groups through formal organisations

In seeking evidence for Committees, it is evident that first call is often to the large, national, and formally constituted organisations. As well as providing a corporate or agency response, you can also ask them to provide you with local branch contacts or names of projects that you can contact directly.

Examples:

Save the Children

This charity has a number of programmes based in local areas of disadvantage, working with young people (See their citizenship and education sites). Right Connection Scotland is a network of children interested in children's rights. By March 2004 groups in 6 locations in Scotland will be linked using the internet and live activities. Their Community Partners programme has projects working with young people in disadvantaged areas who take a new look at their community and environment. <http://www.savethechildren.org.uk>

SCVO

As well as acting as the voice of the voluntary sector, SCVO hosts a lot of different initiatives which you can also access. For example they facilitate a Policy Officers network, which draws together policy or parliamentary officers from a range of smaller organisations. They also facilitate the Social Inclusion Partnership's community representative network which can give you access to the community reps in many areas of Scotland. http://www.scvo.org.uk/partnershiprepnet/reps_profiles/index.htm

Deaf Connections

Also known as Glasgow Centre for the Deaf, they run a wide range of services and projects for people in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. <http://www.deafconnections.co.uk/>

What works?

A personal phone call or e-mail to these contacts can often stimulate more interest than if they receive a circular or formal call for evidence from us through their headquarters. It can also be quicker and more effective. This contact can also be used for "snowballing" – getting advice about who else to talk to, and how to reach or interest their members.

2.3 Organisations with a social purpose

Committees have a good record in tracking down a wide range of specific interest organisations, because of course they are organised. However it is also worth trying some 'lateral thinking' - using other types of national organisations that might have more of a **social or economic purpose**, but would be in contact with communities and groups that you may want to reach. They will often help with putting out posters, publicising events, putting out calls for evidence or even bringing groups of people together, even if the topic or issue is not their central concern. They are also worth asking for advice on wording or how to encourage more interest.

Examples:

Credit Unions

Credit unions offer a significant service in the local economy of many communities. They are socially inclusive in nature, traditionally offering people with a low income the services of a locally controlled bank. In Scotland there are approximately 125 credit unions affiliated to two representative bodies. Scottish League of Credit Unions <http://www.scottishcu.org/> and <http://www.abcul.org/page/index.cfm>

Coal Industry Social Welfare Organisation

This supports and develops local projects in the regeneration of mining communities across Scotland eg helping to apply for funding to set up an IT suite in a community. Some of these local projects will have close links into their community. <http://www.ciswo.org.uk/>

One Plus is an organisation for lone parents, managed by an elected committee and active through the West and in Central Scotland. It creates services, projects, training, and employment opportunities within local communities particularly within the social economy and focuses on better services for lone parents but it is also helpful in providing local contacts of groups who could be approached for any inquiry. <http://www.oneplus.org/>

Women's Rural Institutes

Many reflect the wide social spectrum of people living in small villages in rural areas of Scotland. They have a large membership (up to 700) and take an interest in civic issues. There are 35 area federations each with about 20 – 30 Institutes active in many small villages and communities in rural Scotland. <http://www.swri.org.uk/>

Community Websites

More and more communities are going on-line. This is a really useful way to publicise inquiries or ask for views, but again the language in any material we submit should be very clear and straightforward. For example,

Glasgow <http://www.sunnygovan.org/> and <http://www.drumchapel.org.uk/>
<http://www.eastendconnected.org.uk/>

Highlands http://www.cromartylive.co.uk/community_g.asp
<http://www.lochabercommunity.org.uk/>
http://www.isleofeigg.org/welcome/welcome_frame.htm

Gretna, <http://www.gretna-area.co.uk/> which lists not only contacts for local community groups but for the local business forum

Dundee <http://dundeecity.gov.uk/cchannel/a.php>
<http://www.trp.dundee.ac.uk/research/geddes/projects.html>

Community Radio

Many local radio stations have a loyal following, particularly about local events and news and are a good way to get across the details of a meeting you may want to publicise, or an up and coming inquiry. For a list of local stations try <http://scotlandinter.net/radio.htm>

2.4 Network Organisations

Those that have a national or local networking function can also be approached to see if they could distribute information, to help in encouraging people to come to a meeting, or to conduct a survey. Again, these can be contacted even if the issue is not centrally their concern.

Examples:

CHEX Community Health Exchange

A national network organisation based in Glasgow funded by Health Scotland. It facilitates a network of community health projects across Scotland which can be involved in anything from food co-ops, to environmental issues or mental health work. It also has a remit to support projects in influencing health and social policies and produces a regular newsletter <http://www.scdc.org.uk/chex/home/about.htm>

Anti-Poverty Forums and Networks

These area based networks offer services, and work with and for their local communities to tackle poverty and promote social inclusion. They have links to many local community organisations and individuals. <http://www.dundeeantipoverty.org.uk/> or Moray against Poverty c/o REAP cross@csv.org.uk

Aberdeen Healthy Living Network

This comprises 26 organisations/agencies based in Aberdeen with specific remits for reducing health inequalities. The network organises courses such as 'Cash in your pocket', 'Parenting support' and 'Life skills' and supports ethnic minorities and travellers to address issues about accessing services. Tel. 01224 523832

Fife Women's Network

A registered charity started by local women which promotes and develops services for women. Its key concern is accessibility. They have produced a directory of groups and services for women in Fife listing many small self-help groups for older women or ethnic minority women and now run an e-discussion Forum. They have undertaken consultation work for the Scottish Executive, using locally trained interviewers. www.womeninfife.co.uk

Edinburgh Active Citizenship Group

A network of community based workers from voluntary orgs. and community education who plan and organise debates and seminars which address issues coming up through the Parliament. Tel.0131 469 3048

2.5 Contacting locally based workers

Many local community workers are in touch with more marginalised groups and are often very keen to increase the participation of these people with the political process. Remember also the Parliament Gaelic Outreach and Information Officers.

The current policy context (Community Learning and Development, Social Inclusion and Community Planning) has directed community workers' job remits to focus on participation and active citizenship. There are currently over 3000 graduate-trained practitioners working in this field across Scotland, in direct contact with a range of communities experiencing disadvantage, and dealing with all kinds of issues from health, housing, rural transport, and working with young people, ethnic communities or those with a disability.

Examples:

Community Workers in Local Authorities

Contact local authority departments of Community Education, Community Learning and Development, or Neighbourhood Resource and Development. However, remember that when contacting a local authority, or their staff, you are entering a local political arena, so ensure that you inform the Director of the particular service you are approaching. ([See Ref Sheet 3](#))

In Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIP's), Community Learning Partnerships, or Local Forums

Many SIP's and evolving Community Planning Partnerships fund local Community Forums or Neighbourhood Forums who employ community workers. Some have websites, where you can find a contact. Example <http://www.castlemilk.co.uk/>

Workers Education Association (WEA)

One of the largest providers of adult, community and work placed learning. It has 7 Local Area Units across Scotland and in over 200 localities, community based tutors provide informal courses for those who face barriers to learning as well as the general public. <http://www.weascotland.org.uk/main.htm>

Scottish Education and Action on Development SEAD

A national charity working to challenge poverty and social injustice through a programme of education and action. It encourages international solidarity with a range of exchanges and linked educational programmes and promotes active citizenship in Scotland through these and conferences/workshops etc. See <http://webs.workwithus.org/sead/>

Scottish Civic Forum Local Co-ordinators

SCF now have local co-ordinators in each region in Scotland. Their role is to work with local civic groups to create 'local entry points' to national policy processes. ([See Ref sheet 4](#)) http://www.civicforum.org.uk/local_co-ordinators/local_co-ordinators.htm

2.6 Using local knowledge of MSP's

Many Committees do this already, but it is always worth reminding ourselves that Members are an excellent source of local contacts or ideas for where to go and who to start with.

2.7 Getting to individuals

Finally there are people who will not necessarily belong to any group, and who do not usually engage in the political process. To reach them, think about the places where people will go in an ordinary day, or where people work - shops or supermarkets, bingo halls, schools, nurseries, pubs, buses, care homes, school canteens, transport staff, food co-ops, baby clinics, football matches. Local newspapers are also often looking for material and women's magazines are read widely.

Some of the methods described in Section 5 are appropriate to reach passers by in the street or in public spaces. Local radio stations are often looking for material to broadcast. They are particularly useful in getting to the housebound, unemployed, ethnic communities, and the elderly.

Examples:

Asian Radio Networks

BBC Asian Network covers news and views, arts and entertainment plus the website offers discussion slots. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/asiannetwork/>

Radio Awaz in Glasgow has a small range – 20 mile radius from its base in Govan but runs full time with many volunteers. and is described as the collective voice for the Asian community in the area. It is targeted at all Asian backgrounds and religions – Islam, Sikh, Hinduism, and Christianity. <http://www.radioawaz.com/>

Ramadan Radio Dundee FM107.50 has a month long programming during Ramadan (approximately from 15th October this year, 2004) but includes a dialogue with other cultural communities and interviews with politicians, educators. See <http://www.sundayherald.com/37996>

Meetings in Football Ground

Dundee Community Learning Partnership holds regular learning centre meetings in the local football club ground to attract people. They also advertise on the back of tickets and the club has been happy to collaborate.

On the buses, in the markets, in classes

A local survey conducted in Fife by the Women's Network wanted to reach the wider public and in particular those from ethnic communities. They got a lot of responses from people travelling on local buses, shopping at local markets and those attending English language classes.

Section 3 Planning your Initiative

3.1 General Points

- **Get ‘people-focused’** – think of the best way to encourage people to participate, not always what is best for you. E-mail questionnaires are easy to put out but many people do not access the internet or use it on a regular basis. For example the Environment and Rural Development Committee suspended the formal part of one of their meetings for a short break and anyone in the audience was able to come and say their piece for 2 mins. The transcript of the informal session went into the Official Report
- **Think quality not quantity** of participation. A series of focused smaller group initiatives can often produce good quality material, and might be more likely to attract the wider public we are trying to reach.
- **Going out to people in their own communities** and in their own environment – community centres, local clubs, miners welfare clubs, mother and toddlers centres, credit union branch, adult learning centres, fishermen’s clubs, crofts, partnership offices, food co-ops, shopping centres. Communities, Health and Environment and Rural Development Committees have done this and seen positive results.
- **Use intermediaries** if a group might be cynical or reluctant to participate – a local community worker or a network agency.
- **Involve people you want to reach at the earliest planning stages** – whether it is to gauge the issues which are most important ([Example 2](#)), or help in planning an event. Many workers or volunteers are happy to be involved and will put a lot of effort in to make an event or an inquiry work well. Their local knowledge will help you get it right – such as the most suitable local venues - and they can help to increase local attendance, through word of mouth.
- **Face to face briefing meetings** for workers or agencies who are linked into networks and groups can produce more interest than a circular letter or a listing on our website.
- **Be realistic** about how much effort and time people will want to give – they have busy lives too. Try not to put pressure on people or feel they should jump because it’s important to us.
- **Make it practically easy** for people, and think of their needs and costs - location/accessibility/ time of meeting/ transport/ childcare refreshments/ interpreters /sign language interpreters etc. if inviting them to come out to a meeting. This is part of creating a more level playing field.

3.2 Initial Questions

Establishing a clear brief that clarifies what you are trying to achieve will help you be more effective and make best use of your time and energy. Even if there is time pressure, skipping this bit will only make it worse. Sit down with everyone involved and make sure you are clear and agree about the following:

Background:	what do you want to find out?
Purpose:	why do you want to engage people?
Audience:	who do you want to engage with?
Equality proofing:	how will you encourage equal access?
Methods:	how will you best achieve your aims?
Timing:	when is information needed by the Committee?
Resources	Staff, budget needed roles?
Results:	how will you analyse the information?
Feedback:	how will you feedback information to Participants, and keep them informed?
Evaluation:	how will you know if it has been effective?

Checklist to get to key questions

Clarifying and giving time to working out the key questions to address will help to make any participatory initiative more effective, whether a fact finding visit, a community conference, or call for evidence. Checking these out is also important. For example, the Local Government Committee used pre-event questionnaires to gauge the rating of issues that were going to be considered in their civic participation event on local democracy.

This stage is always more complicated than it appears – but to struggle with this clarity will help everything else fall into place.

- What do we know already, what are the gaps in information?
- Which information will most help our inquiry?
- How much time do we have to get information?
- Are we going wide for a general sense or going deep for a more focused investigation?
- Who will be most affected by, or have the most relevant experience of the issue?
- Who should we pilot or check the questions with before we finally decide?
- Will the questions give us the information we are searching for?
- Will we be able to handle all the information we are asking for in a useful way?
- Which questions will be best provided by statistical research and which by qualitative information?

Section 4 Getting it Right

4.1 Creating the right atmosphere

Small practical considerations can make a lot of difference – and they don't cost anything! People contribute more if they feel relaxed and comfortable. This includes physical comfort but more importantly whether they feel at ease in the situation. Jargon, complex language, formal processes and layout, or unfamiliar ways of running a meeting can all combine as a barrier which reduces some people's confidence, makes them feel less powerful and therefore less likely to contribute their opinions or views.

- **Welcoming** people, providing tea/coffee and introducing them to others, or allowing a “mingling time” at the start of a meeting or event helps people to settle in and feel part of it. The Health Committee's Away Day in Loch Melfort in August 2003, is a good example.
- **Comfortable venues** -When organising venues, apart from physical access issues, consider how user friendly it is for the groups you are targeting. People will communicate and participate more when they feel at ease. Grand hotels, conference centres, official offices or town halls are not always conducive to good communication – some people feel more at ease in a place they know and use, for example nurseries, community centres, or sports ground. Is it easy to get there - near good bus or train routes? <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/health/ucmr-02.asp>
- **Seating** arrangements can set the tone of any meeting. Don't be put off if the venue has laid out an arrangement which you think is too formal for the people you are inviting – change it – it can make all the difference. ([Ref Sheet 5](#)).

4.2 Communication

Being aware of barriers does not mean we have to have a cozy chat – sometimes formality is necessary - but we should be conscious of its likely effect on communication for some groups whose involvement we want to encourage.

Encouraging participation is as much about empathy and significant dialogue as it is about special techniques or methods. Good communication skills, respectful interactions and feedback all increase the integrity of our relationship with the wider public.

- **Use plain and straightforward language.**
In any written and spoken communication, try and keep it short and simple. Complicated language or jargon is a big turn off for many people and it makes them feel stupid. This is a challenge when dealing with bills and technical details but it is a good discipline to be mindful of this.

Ask someone outside your immediate team to read your publicity material to see if it is clear, such as a Public Information Officer. (See Equal Opportunities Fact sheet 6 in SPEIR and A Guide to Producing Accessible Written Information in the Scottish Parliament)

If you are targeting particular groups, try and run written material past people who are involved, to see what they would suggest. The layout and wording of calls for evidence is crucial if you want those outside the usual consultation networks to take part.

(See <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/translations.html>)

- **Allow jargon to be explained or simplified**

In any public meeting or event, be very conscious of avoiding jargon or acronyms. If you use them, always explain. Try the “Yellow Card” method ([Example 3](#)). Diagrams, simple pictures, or symbol can also convey information quickly and simply.

- **Make connections for people**

Try to outline connections between an inquiry or legislation to people’s everyday lives. Where possible give examples. If the impact of an issue or piece of legislation is less obvious, make links, or offer opportunities for people to understand it through informal workshops before a formal hearing.

- **Use appropriate equipment** - Microphones are important if the venue is large or the audience is older and more likely to have hearing issues. However they can create a distance between speakers and people and some groups are not at ease with roving mikes. Consider taking a portable induction loop system to meetings where there may be people who are hard of hearing.

Similarly power point presentations or OHP’s can create a distance between the speaker and audience. It can be part of the feeling of operating in different worlds - a lot of technical equipment can convey a very professional or business atmosphere, which although sometimes appropriate, can be off-putting for some groups.

If the lights have to go down for a presentation, people get into ‘cinema mode’ - become more passive and settle down to ‘watch’ a performance. Trying to get active participation afterwards can then be much harder. If using an OHP, turn it off between slides if you are talking for more than a minute, the buzz can send some people off to sleep! These considerations obviously have to be balanced with providing a clear presentation that everyone can see and hear.

4.3 Power and knowledge issues

Through some of the ideas outlined here, you may be very successful in getting people to come along to a meeting but they may still be unconfident if they are unsure about technical details or indeed how their contributions will fit into the Parliament's structures.

Some people can feel cynical or hostile, even if they have had no experience of politicians or politics at all. Their lives might have felt dictated to by officials who had considerable power over them and they have felt powerless and never able to influence anything. Consequently their feelings towards anyone in authority or a professional role can be negative and wary. Some people feel they live in a completely different world from mainstream society. Supporting them positively as equal citizens can redress this imbalance of power and knowledge.

- **'People first'** – is a principle from popular education methods. It means letting the audience speak first, so they engage from the beginning and become active participants rather than a passive audience. ([Ref Sheet 6](#))
- **Show that value is given to their local knowledge** by treating it seriously, and listening and valuing all comments, including obscure, negative or critical ones
- **Help people get to grips with the subject** if it is unfamiliar or technical by clear, straightforward input, stopping for and encouraging questions, and by adopting methods which allow more discussion and deliberation in small groups. ([Example 4](#))
- **Provide practical information** for people about how to submit amendments, or questions– giving examples always helps. Participation Services could help you run a training workshop or provide information material about committee structures and what happens to their contributions as an option before or after your formal meeting.
- **Inform people what will happen to their contributions** A quick outline at the end of a meeting about how the Committee will decide on the issue, who else is being consulted, what happens next, with dates if possible and practical details of how to access information on the website, will all help people to understand the process they are engaged in. A lot of people are still unsure about using a website, so for some groups it may be helpful to take them through it step by step and provide a sheet they can take home with them ([Example 5](#))

4.4 Planning an Accessible Event

There are a number of very practical things to think about in equality proofing any event – language, physical access, or food. See the guide "Running Accessible Events".

Section 5 Methods to make it work

5.1 Introduction

In choosing your approach, remember there is no one 'right' method. All sorts of things dictate which ones work best in which circumstances. A few of the methods can be used in an 'off the shelf' way, but the majority need to be adapted to the range of audiences, the size of meetings, and the committee's needs and timescale - this then will influence the cost.

- Many 'techniques' have become brand names, although the method used will not be much different to basic good participatory practice. For larger gatherings, for example, there will be variations on a basic theme – concise or stimulating input, small break out groups, a way of framing people's experience, prioritising, and feeding back comments.
- Some of the smaller practical details outlined in the previous section always increase participation and can easily be incorporated into any public meeting.
- Remember also all the pre-work and access issues that have been outlined in previous sections – this will increase participation in the event itself.
- Don't rely on just one method – combining statistical surveys with a qualitative and/or deliberative methods will give a more rounded picture of what the public thinks. Knowing more about who you want to engage will help you to find the best method.
- Don't be put off by the more creative active engagement methods – feedback and comments can all be gathered into an oral or written form that can be used as formal evidence if required.
- All techniques have the potential to strengthen the democratic process through the effect they have on the people participating. A positive experience is likely to strengthen democracy, a negative one to undermine it.

The list that follows provides only a thumbnail sketch of possible methods in order to give a flavour of what is possible. For more detailed information on effectiveness try

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/innovative.pdf> and other Toolkits, try <http://www.cebsd.org/participation.htm> or http://www.shstrust.org.uk/pdf/pinc_practicalguide.pdf

5.2 Individual Views

- Written evidence
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Listening surveys
- Citizen's panels
- Video Box
- Street Stalls

5.3. Group Views (5-15)

- Focus groups
- Group interviews
- Round Table workshops
- Sounding Board panels
- Specific interest groups
- Nominal Group technique

5.4 Larger Meetings (15-500)

- Public Meetings
- Open Space
- Local Sustainability Model
- Future search
- Planning for Real
- Whole System Conferences
- Fishbowl
- Brainstorming Solutions Workshop

5.5 Active Engagement Methods

- Interactive Displays
- Mapping
- Popular Education
- Forum Theatre
- Graphic recording
- Story Dialogue
- Banner making
- Imagine
- Democs

5.2 Gathering Individual Views

Written Evidence

Most likely to involve those who are more engaged with the Parliament, or active in civic society. Harder to reach out to the wider public or more marginalised groups.

To increase uptake:

- improve the wording and style of the call for evidence. Checking it out with a representative of the groups you are hoping to reach, may help to get it more user-friendly. Public Information Officers can also help.
- going out or speaking to groups or local workers about it face to face is always more productive.
- contacting community based workers or local adult education /learning centres who can help people frame their contributions.
- placing the call on local radio or as a poster in local newsletters/community centres/bingo halls/shopping centres/nurseries may bring more responses.
- “piggy back” onto initiatives already planned, eg fairs, festivals, rural shows. Find out by contacting local community workers.

Interviews

Useful for more sensitive information, as participants can build a temporary relationship with the interviewer which improves the quality and content of the interview. Carried out face to face or by telephone. Can also be useful for reaching excluded groups. In-depth interviews can also be carried out with 2 or even 3 people. Less confident people can bring along a friend, which can make them more relaxed.

Local interviewers can be used, after an initial training, in order to both widen the knowledge of the interviewers, enable people to be interviewed who would not engage through more formal methods with strangers, and leave behind some increased skills in the community.

Surveys

Effective way of contacting a large number of people and gathering their views and comments. Mostly used to achieve representative findings and results that are statistically robust. Can be carried out through face-to-face or telephone interviews or postal questionnaires. E-mail questionnaires can be used to collect information quickly from groups who are quite dispersed, at relatively low cost, but this can exclude those not connected to the internet.

Usual response rate to general postal questionnaires are about 10-25%. 60% would be excellent. When questionnaires are targeted at specific interest groups the response rates can be much higher (60 – 70%)

Listening Surveys

These are not intended to gain a representative view but are a participatory mechanism to involve larger sections of the community in getting involved with issues. Local people receive initial briefing and training and then go to where people are – in the street/ shopping malls/buses/ community events/football matches/outside benefits office – and ask a small number of questions about an issue or the area. The respondents are then invited to come to a follow up meeting where their views will be used to set the agenda for discussion.

Citizen's Panels

These are groups of individuals who have agreed to be consulted periodically for their views. Attempts made to make them representative of the target population. Careful recruiting is needed to ensure that excluded groups are represented but this still excludes those who would find written work difficult or whose first language is not English. The size can vary between 750 -2000. If they are used regularly (3 times/year)) they can be useful but if not, people drift off and the panel has to be re-started again. Drop out rate is about 30% a year, so maintenance is ongoing. Costs for panel of 800 approximately £40- 50,000 to set up and £30 – 40,000 to maintain and run 3 surveys a year. They require a lot of work to establish and maintain. For an evaluation of Panels and Citizens' Juries See [Evaluation of People's Panels and People's Juries in Social Inclusion Partnerships](#)

Video Box

These booths can be temporarily placed in a centre, or used throughout a conference or larger event. The advantage is that people can record their views privately. A number of them could be used in different geographic locations over a set period to encourage participation from the wider public. This obviously attracts a self-selecting group, and would not be considered representative information, but can be useful to gauge opinion. Should be used alongside other methods.

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library3/health/ucmr-02.asp>

Street Stalls

Street stalls are interactive displays held out of doors. They make it possible to secure the views of larger numbers of people than is normally possible indoors. They are particularly useful where the views of people using a particular service or public space are required. A highly public location is selected and exhibition and interactive display material mounted for a selected period. Facilitators are on hand to encourage people to make comments and this can lead to informal debates. This may be advertised in advance but is not essential. Sample also self-selecting

5.3 Gathering Group Views (5-15)

Focus groups

Typically 8-10 people in the group, led by a trained facilitator who keeps the group to task in terms of a set of questions and does not get involved in any discussion that ensues. Any group discussion tends to spark off ideas which can be more participatory. Issues can be explored in some depth, but should start with simple questions. The questions have to be prepared carefully with those planning the exercise to ensure you get the answers that are relevant. The discussions are usually taped or there is a note-taker. Sometimes the comments can be written up on flipchart paper during the course of the discussion for all to see. However opinions do tend to the norm. People are invited because of their particular experience, or as a representative sample of an area or group you wish to target.

Group Interviews

People invited together to discuss a topic in a fairly open ended way. As above, this can be a representative sample, or an existing group, or people who have similar experiences or different ones. The facilitator can interact more and encourage areas of discussion which might be less obvious. It is a good way of getting a feel for a topic or establishing what some of the issues might be in constructing a questionnaire or future focus group.

Round Table Workshops

These can be run with anything between 10 -100 people, although obviously the larger grouping needs excellent organisation and facilitation. Sometimes they can run over a few sessions, so that the outcomes from one feeds into the next, sometimes using the same people, or different cohorts. A good method to produce a wide range of opinions and ideas, involve a mix of participants, and to set themes or parameters for complex issues. Usually involves an introduction and specialist presentation(from professional or community expert), then a round table brainstorming (7-10 at each table), then more questions to specialists and lastly a report back from each table at the end, usually highlighting 3 or 4 main points. It is important that the topic or question is reasonably focused and not too broad.

Sounding Board Panels

Useful for setting up at the start of a process, to act as an anchor. The group can be a mixture of professional or technical expertise, academics, local experience, from groups experiencing exclusion etc. As distinct from Advisors they can be part of the deliberative process of the committee or can act to hold to a frame of reference agreed at the start. A number can be set up in different geographical locations to represent different perspectives and meet at the beginning, middle or end of an initiative.

Specific Interest Groups

Meeting with people who have developed an interest, concern, expertise about a particular topic can give more in depth analysis and information and alert you to aspects which might be unusual or complex.

Campaigning groups are also often well versed in specific aspects and should not be ignored. Special interest groups usually represent a particular position but they can give information which is often masked by the official view.

Nominal Group Technique

A way of priority searching. Usually about 8-10 in group. Have to begin with a specific and clear question, and then participants identify issues and prioritise them. Each person submits their best idea and these are written up, then there is a clarification of these – duplicates are brought together and individual ideas numbered. People then vote on ideas and then they are prioritised. The last stage is considering what needs to be done to achieve what is the top priority.

<http://crs.uvm.edu/gopher/nerl/group/a/meet/Exercise7/b.html>

<http://www.deboldgroup.com/TQM/nominal.htm>

5.4 Larger meetings (15-500)

Public Meetings

Arranged for members of the public to find out about and express their views on particular issues, this is one of the most commonly used, and yet most maligned method. The key advantage is that they are open to all and held in a public place. They are also a transparent way to show openness, they keep people informed and they catch a range of views. Disadvantages are there are sometimes low attendances, they are not always widely representative and they can get locked onto local issues. However many of these disadvantages can be reduced by noting the points raised in this Handbook.

Most negative reactions to 'the public meeting' are a result of poor or defensive chairing, high top table and rows of seats at a distance, solutions already decided and no opportunity for public contributions for the first hour or so.

Clarity about what the meeting is about and which questions it would like to address are crucial. An explanation of how views will be fed in and what will happen when should be given. The time of the meeting will dictate attendance – daytime, you would attract more retired or older people. Putting on a crèche will encourage parents to attend. A well briefed Chair is crucial to the effectiveness of the meeting. Break out groups in smaller numbers can encourage more participation. Capturing information can be done through large sheets of flipchart paper, taping, or a note taker – sometimes the visibility of flipcharts or whiteboards helps people to see their contributions in a concrete way and enhances their sense of being taken seriously. Seating arrangements can also be quite flexible, rather than the usual top table and rows.

Open Space Workshops (20 - 500)

These provide a highly democratic framework for enabling any group of people to create their own programme of discussions on almost any theme without much preparation. They are particularly useful for looking at issues, opportunities, actions, and priorities. They can take place from ½ day up to 3 days. Participants decide themselves on the issues they want to discuss, using a simple procedure usually guided by a facilitator.

Workshop sessions are self managed by the participants within a framework of simple principles and 'rules'. Each workshop session develops a list of actions required and who should take them. A report of the event is circulated to all participants. Trained facilitators are crucial for managing this large scale process. <http://www.openfutures.com/>

See also example from Justice 1 Committee in Session 1 SP Paper 622 who also used short case studies for people to use as a reference throughout the day.

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S1/official_report/cttee/just1-02/j1r02-cpe-02.htm#P87_3124

Local Sustainability Model (20 – 100)

This was devised by Drew Mackie as a tool for professional and communities so that communities can assess their current position in terms of sustainability and then test the effect of new initiatives policies, or courses of action on these. It was devised to allow a better dialogue to develop between professionals, who deal with complex scientific concepts and communities who are concerned about the quality of their environment, and the complications of finding a common language. This device helps to maintain the links between the natural environment, the community and the local economy.

The Model uses a simple three by three matrix. The three aspects considered are the natural environment; the community and its culture; and the economy. These are ranked as being Robust, Stable or Fragile. Communities can use this framework to assess how their area performs, shading in the model to provide a “picture” that local people can recognise. The process of establishing the model leads a community through discussions on these three aspects using local knowledge and professional expertise. Could be adapted to other themes

http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/Economicdevelopment/water_framework_directive.asp

Future Search Conference

Future search conferences are highly structured events, usually lasting 2 ½ days. They enable a cross-section of community members or 'stakeholders' to create a shared vision for the future. They are more suited for dealing with general issues than specifics but are engaging and energising.

People representing the widest possible range of interests, or 'stakeholder' groups, are brought together in one room, usually for 2 ½ days. The ideal number is considered to be 64 since this breaks down into 8 groups of 8. For larger groups, conferences can be run in parallel. The agenda is: 'The Future of XX 5 to 20 years on'. A highly structured 5-step procedure is adopted designed to encourage people to think globally, focus on the future, identify common ground and make public commitments to action. People carry out exercises individually, in small self-managed workshops and as a whole group. The results are recorded openly on flipcharts. <http://www.wrda.net/futuresearch/TheTask.htm>

Planning for Real

Planning for Real uses simple physical models as a focus for people to put forward and prioritise ideas on how their area can be improved. It is a highly visible, hands-on community development and empowerment tool, which people of all abilities and backgrounds find easy and enjoyable to engage in.

This method uses 3 dimensional materials or models for people to see potential changes in their community – for example a new railway line or Wind farm. Comments and opinions are then written on cards or post-its and added to the model – other comments then build on these. Good for those who are less comfortable with written material etc. It can be set up in a community venue and run over a number of days.

Whole System Conferences

This type of conference invites representatives of 'the whole system', in other words all the key people or agencies who are involved in, or affected by a service. This is often used to contribute towards service development plans, but can be adapted to an "issue" or proposed policy. This captures the different elements that need to be addressed or listened to. It can be organised in slightly different ways – either mixing different stake-holders or separating them at different stages in the process.

Fishbowl Discussion (25 – 50)

This method allows people to grapple with complex or controversial issues where there are strong differences of view. A panel of people (3-5), representing the different views or position in the process are well briefed to present their view or case for 5 – 10mins, in turn. They do this in the centre of the room or space – in the 'fishbowl'. The rest of the participants are arranged around them. They then have 20 mins to discuss the issue, whilst the majority of the participants seated around them, observe silently and/or take notes. After this, participants can enter the fishbowl to contribute a point of view.

Smaller discussion groups, then examine the different perspectives, each including one member of the panel, and report back on the pros and cons of this view. After a break, or lunch, a different mix of small groups then discuss the whole issue and suggest 2 or 3 key areas that need attention or action. The audience has to be carefully invited so that

different views are represented. Discussion groups should be no more than 8-10 people.

Brainstorming Solutions Workshop

See [\(Example 6\)](#) from Enterprise and Culture Committee

5.5 Active Engagement Methods

Interactive Displays

Interactive displays allow people to engage in the issues and debate, on their own and in an enjoyable way, by making additions or alterations to pre-prepared exhibits. Interactive displays can be used as part of a forum, workshop, exhibition, conference or other event, or placed in a community centre for a few days.

The displays can range from blank sheets with simple one-line questions to fill in, or cards to write on or stickies. They can be drawings or models of complex development proposals. A dynamic develops as people's comments build up on the displays over time. Thoughtful design is required to ensure that the information is presented simply and clearly and that people's responses are recorded in such a way that they can be used afterwards.

Mapping

Mapping is an effective non-verbal way of finding out how people view their area. It is a good way to gather and present site-specific data, understand differences in perception and stimulate debate. Often used as a basis for joint planning, but can be adapted for an inquiry subject. Individuals or groups create physical maps of their neighbourhood, service provision or city using pen and paper, cloth, chalk or other materials to hand.

A framework or theme is normally provided to focus people's thoughts, eg places you visit frequently, landmarks, boundaries, places you avoid, things you would like to see.

The maps are discussed and analysed as a basis for understanding differing viewpoints and planning what should be done.

Popular Education methods

Developed by Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educationist, this method now adapted in Scotland, encourages people to take an objective and analytic view of their own experiences and situation, and place it in a wider social and political context. It is appropriate for controversial or high profile topics. The approach can be adapted to enable people to discuss an issue at some depth, during a day conference or gathering. It involves creating a visual "code" (photos, drama, or poem) which contains within it the key contradictions or elements of a situation or issue that relate to people at an emotional level. Trigger questions take participants through the next stages of a cognitive and then analytic process. It needs

a skilled popular education worker but can operate with a small group of 8-10 or larger groups up to 60.

Forum Theatre

This method was influenced by Freire (above) and developed by Auguste Boale . A problem situation or issue, that has resonance with the audience, is acted out as a short piece of theatre or tableau. The audience is then invited to offer alternative scenarios, or change the way the actors were doing something, or they can also move into the drama itself and add their version of how it could be. The aim is to encourage a lot of physical interaction and discussion with the audience in order to suggest a solution or display the real problems.

This is a useful stimulating method for younger people (who don't always like sitting still) or with people whose first language is not English. This has been successfully used in Scotland, most recently to discuss changes to community care.

Graphic Recording

This is a highly visual way of recording a discussion or debate or evidence giving through visual symbols, words, pictures which are drawn on huge sheets of paper that everyone can see. Thick coloured pens are used and the recorder works in tandem with the facilitator, concentrating on people's own words and connections. The advantage of this method is that people can literally 'see' the connections in their thinking, they can see the richness of the whole discussion at a glance, and they get more involved with the developing conversation. The graphic recording can become a group memory – it can also be left behind in the location to stimulate further contributions from the public. Like using flipcharts, when people see what they are saying recorded visibly, they feel acknowledged, and they can check its accuracy there and then. This is also very accessible to groups whose first language may not be English or people who experience learning difficulties.

<http://www.christinevalenza.com/gr.html>

Story Dialogue

At meetings, people often want to tell their own personal story. This method developed by Ronald Labonte in Canada structures this into a useful way of understanding the themes that stories contain and into more generalisable information. It involves briefing a number of "storytellers" beforehand, who might each represent a different element of the issue, for example someone who has been vandalised, the police, a community member, a young person who has been accused of anti-social behaviour. They then tell their stories in a particular format, which allows for further questioning, reflection, and analysis. The process moves from the particular to the general through developing 'insight cards'. The end result generates lessons learnt about best practice, in the form of a basic theory. It can be used for evaluating policy, or examining best practice. This method needs a fair number of small break out rooms and a bigger space for all to work together.

Banner making

Encouraging groups to “tell their story” or their point of view through making paper murals or banners is another highly engaging method which can trigger and stimulate a wide ranging discussion for the participants and is a playful and creative method which suits some groups who do not enjoy formal or written means of communication. The task can be to represent a key question, problem or solution in the form of a banner. These can be done fairly quickly using paper or sticking fabric as a creative stage in a larger event, with the messages in the banners being reported and shown to the plenary group.

They can also remain behind as a trigger and a means to stimulate more interest or discussion in a particular location, with a possible follow up meeting designed to capture wider views.

Appreciative Inquiry

A way of harnessing people’s positive and creative energies in order to imagine a better situation and analysing what needs to happen to get there, including their own part in it as active citizens. This method started as a management tool but has been developed to include dialogue sessions about an area or about an issue, between generations. This was developed in Chicago and has been developed in Scotland for large scale conferences and workshops.

<http://imaginechicago.org/connections.html#appreciative>

DEMOCS is an acronym for deliberative meetings organised by citizens. This is a card game developed by the New Economics Foundation as a way of helping people tackle and discuss difficult or technical issues in a novel way. It is quick, cheap and fun for the participants. People play in groups of 6. At the moment it is being developed for specific and complex topics such as stem cell research, waste planning and health issues but their ideas can be adapted. Participation Services has a copy of one of their games.

http://www.neweconomics.org/gen/participation_democs.aspx

Help with these ideas

Don’t be put off by these more creative ideas. They can be adapted and the results converted into written information or evidence fairly simply. Contacts for facilitators or more help with adapting them to your particular needs and timescale can be obtained from Participation Services.

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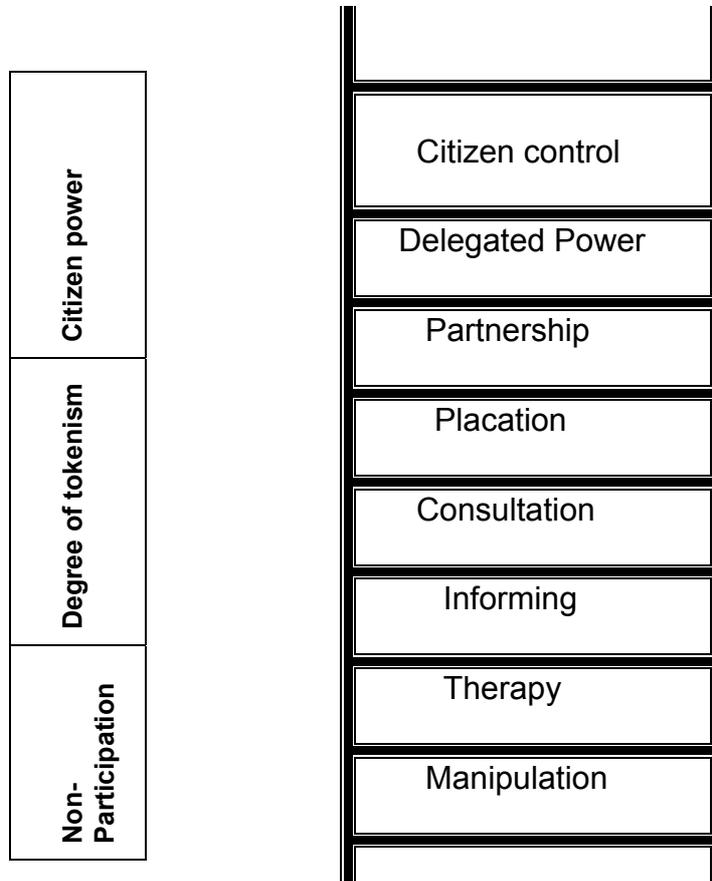
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COSLA (1999)

Guidance on Enhancing Public Participation in Local Government
DETR (1998)

Reference Sheet 1

Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Partnership



Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Partnership is an old but much quoted source in discussions about the degree of power sharing and control that is allowed within these interactions.

Her central point was there should be a move up the ladder.

Ref: Sherry Arnstein 1969 A Ladder of citizen partnership Published by the Journal of American Planning Association Vol 35 Issue 4

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Reference Sheet 2

Different Perceptions of the public



Consumerist

People as customers should be asked for their views or opinions about services. Emphasis is on what they need or want as individuals. Individual choice is a key issue.

Democratic

As citizens, all the people have the right to become engaged both individually and collectively in influencing political decisions. Dialogue is a key issue.

Increasing consultation with the public over service planning and delivery has been developing for a number of years. Much of this has viewed the public as consumers, asking them for their views about what matters most to them as individuals.

From a democratic perspective, a dialogue with people as citizens has to include views and opinions of decisions and plans which benefit the whole community or wider society. This enters the realm of more recent theoretical ideas about deliberative democracy. For further reading try John S Dryzek *"Deliberation, Democracy and Beyond"* OUP 2000 or David Held *"Models of Democracy"* Cambridge: Polity Press 1996

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Reference Sheet 3

Approaching Local Authorities

The following is taken from a response from a local authority official, after we asked for guidance as to the best way to approach them if we wanted to contact local groups and work with their staff.

“In general it is always useful to have **information in advance, even if it is only about a possibility** which may be cancelled or change.

As a matter of course it is useful if you **inform the Director of the appropriate service**. This ensures that at an officer level we are ready to support your consultation process, and also ensures that internally we alert the appropriate range of political interests.

Time I know is always a factor, however we do want to ensure that not only the authority and the elected members are able to adequately respond to consultations, but that local organisations and community representatives also have that opportunity. To that end we do invest quite heavily in **working alongside both yourselves and local organisations** when a visit/consultation is arranged.

- To help in doing this the more information you can give us at the **earliest possible opportunity** is important.
- To ensure that local groups feel that they have been fully involved in the process it is also helpful; if you can be **alive to local needs** – this can be about when or where meetings happen as well as who is involved.
- To allow the above to happen, communication is obviously a central concern. It is useful for us to develop **a relationship** with someone from participation services or particular committee clerks to ensure that locally we can balance your needs with the needs of communities that we have to continue working with after the visit has finished. “

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Reference Sheet 4

Scottish Civic Forum Regional Co-ordinators

The SCF have recently appointed regional co-ordinators for the Civic Forum in seven of the eight regions of Scotland: Highlands and Islands, Mid Scotland and Fife, Lothians, South of Scotland, Glasgow, Central Scotland and West of Scotland. The position of regional co-ordinator for North-East Scotland is currently vacant. A co-ordinator for ethnic minorities and a co-ordinator's advisor has also been appointed.

The role of the regional co-ordinators is not to create local civic forums but to work with local civic groups and the Civic Forum to create 'local entry points' into national policy processes. Through this the Civic Forum is seeking to overcome feelings of exclusion or 'distance from the centre' which can be felt by people around Scotland, especially those in marginalised groups.

Thus, initially, as the Civic Forum agrees on issues to focus attention on, it will be possible to draw in people from different localities from Scotland, either representing local groups or local levels of national organisations, and local community activists and interested individuals. Check the following are up to date. (Tel 0131 557 6767 or enquiries@civicforum.org.uk)

<p>Glasgow Vanessa Taylor Glasgow Vanessa.taylor@civicforum.org.uk</p> <p>South Scotland John Dowson Dumfries Tel 01387 264454 (W) john.dowson@tiscali.co.uk</p> <p>South Scotland Jane Overton Kilmarnock Tel 01563 536 960 janeoverton@onetel.net.uk</p> <p>Lothians Angela Moohan West Lothian Tel 01506 510002 angelamoohan@yahoo.co.uk</p>	<p>Lothians Mathew Gibson Edinburgh Tel 0131 228 6767 (H) Tel 0131 556 5201 (W) outlook@dprc1.fsnet.co.uk</p> <p>Highlands & Islands Margaret Mulholland Inverness Tel 01463 237603 Maggie@peewit.vispa.com</p> <p>Mid Scotland & Fife Alan Spinks Glenrothes Tel. 01592 748881 spinksA@aol.com</p> <p>Highlands & Islands – Skye (volunteer) Andy Anderson Nr Portree Isle of Skye Tel 01470 542365 Andy_a_2000@yahoo.co.uk</p>
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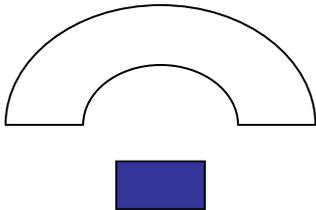
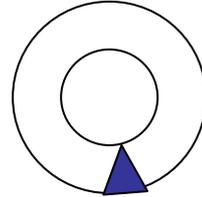
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Reference Sheet 5

Seating Arrangements

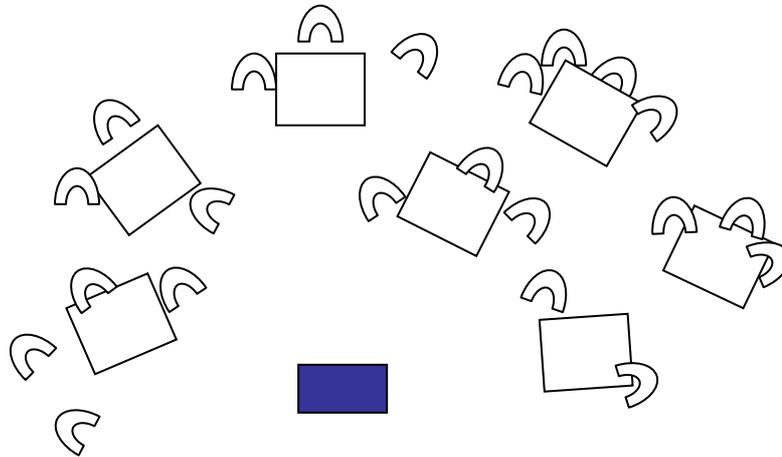
Seating arrangements are not neutral and do have an influence on any event you may be planning. Speaking “down to” has real and symbolic meaning when there is a platform raised above an audience who are arranged at some distance. Front table and rows can remind people of school and the hierarchies they experienced.

1. For less formal gatherings and to encourage more equal dialogue, the basic circle is the easiest to convey a more collaborative process.

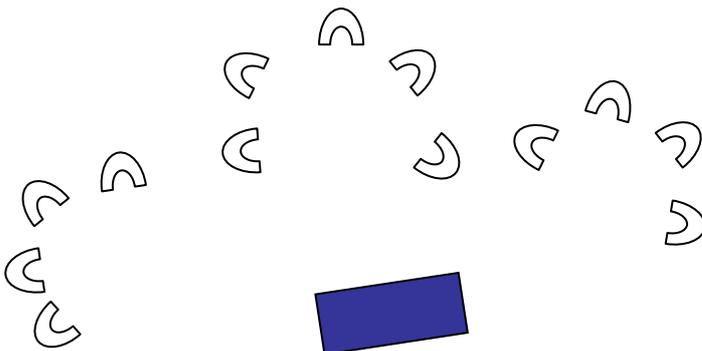


2. A semi-circle if you need a table for notes or OHP etc is still better for interaction than rows.

3. “Café style”, can create an informal feel, and easier for people to relate to others in a small group and feel more relaxed. Refreshments can add to this and make it feel much less threatening. People will shuffle chairs around so they can see and hear.



4. “Scallops” are another way of creating small groupings



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Reference Sheet 6

Saying the First Word

Why?

For people who are not so used to attending meetings organised by the Scottish Parliament, they may well come feeling unsure about what might happen and about whether their own views will be worth anything. Informal meetings in local centres will immediately relax the situation but if you are organising a slightly larger event with speakers or people doing presentations etc this can often remind people of being at school and sitting on the back row, dreading being asked anything.

Starting with their contribution before any outside input can redress the power balance in subtle ways.

- It allows people to have their views given space and listened to, which conveys an atmosphere of respect for all participants
- It can remind those who have come to present information, where their audience is coming from and what they are most interested in or want to know etc. so that their input connects better with the audience.
- It helps people get over the first hurdle of speaking at a meeting – if you sit silent too long it becomes harder.
- It can relax an audience as it helps people relate to each other as people, not unknown strangers about whom you might have all types of assumptions – ie they will all know more than me.

Going round a room saying your name and your job, immediately introduces a status hierarchy for those who are not in a job. Many professionals are used to this and will launch into this mode unless you state another way of doing this.

How?

A more useful way is to ask people to say their name plus one of these questions which have the effect of putting people into an active mode.

- Why they have come?
- What they hope to get out of it?
- The most important issue locally?
- The word that comes into their head when they think of “X” (the topic under discussion)

Going round the group is fine up to about 15, but you will need to allow about a minute per person. To stop people taking ages and launching into a bigger conversation, you can be quite precise and say – one sentence/one word etc depending on time. For larger groups, even hundreds, you can still do this by asking people to do the same with the person sitting next to them. Even though there might not be time for hearing from everyone, this will still start the event with a more participatory dynamic. Filling the room with a buzz of conversation gives a good start to an event. [\(Back to main document\)](#)

Example 1

Health Committee Fact Finding Trips in relation to the Community Care Inquiry (October 1999- November 2000)

1. Background

The Committee, in pursuing its inquiry, felt that many aspects of the situation were not satisfactory. The Committee had been anxious throughout to view service provision from the perspective of the individual. The Committee considered that services should be needs and not resource led and that the provision of health and social care services should be seamless. They felt that the individual should be paramount in the delivery of community care services. The Committee also recognised the role that carers and voluntary organisations play in the provision of community care.

2. Committee consideration

During the period of the inquiry, from October 1999 to November 2000, the Committee heard oral evidence from 18 organisations, supported by written evidence. The Committee also received further written evidence from over 80 organisations and individuals.

3. Fact Finding Trips

In the period June 2000 to September 2000 groups of Committee members visited 10 areas throughout the country, including the Western Isles, to discuss the delivery of community care in a number of different settings and to investigate examples of good practice. There was a mix of urban, rural and island areas.

The Committee members felt that they gained a great deal from these fact finding trips. They spoke to a huge number of individuals and organisations many of whom would have found it impossible to have given formal evidence

The members indicated that there was enormous value in visiting these areas and seeing how community care was delivered in practice. Some of the assumptions they had made were overturned when hearing from individuals. The information gathered allowed members to understand fully the difficulties that those providing community care services and those receiving those services encountered. For example, in the Western Isles it was felt that elderly people put a higher priority on remaining in a care home on the island they came from, near their relatives, than being in purpose built accommodation with modern facilities.

Members reported back to the rest of the members on their findings from each of the visits. [\(Back to main document\)](#)

Example 2

Equal Opportunities Committee Inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and Public Sector Policies

Introduction

1. In response to correspondence received from Gypsy Travellers Michael McMahon arranged for the race reporters' group to meet with individual Gypsy Travellers and representatives of Gypsy Traveller groups/associations to discuss in more detail the issues they wished to bring to the Committee's attention. Michael McMahon then reported to the Committee on the issues which were raised.
2. The Committee subsequently held a formal evidence session to hear directly from Gypsy Travellers and this was supported by written evidence. In addition to the evidence given in public, two members of the Gypsy Traveller community gave evidence in private as they wished to remain anonymous.

The Committee Inquiry

3. Following consideration of the issues raised in evidence, the Committee decided to carry out a committee inquiry into Gypsy Travellers and public sector policies. From the outset of its inquiry, the Committee endeavoured to involve the Gypsy Traveller communities and to engage positively with the public bodies providing services in Scotland.
4. As part of the inquiry, Members visited nine individual local authority Gypsy Traveller sites and took oral evidence from a total of 39 witnesses from 17 organisations, including statutory and voluntary organisations, professional associations and higher education, and five young Gypsy Travellers.
5. To facilitate and make less intimidating the evidence session with the young Gypsy Travellers, the Committee agreed a specific format with Save the Children, which was co-ordinating the attendance of the young people. The Committee organised to meet the young people first informally over breakfast, following which they were given a brief talk on the Parliament by the Education section. The evidence session was held in one of the smaller committee rooms to avoid formality, cameras and a potentially large audience. The media office was also notified that the Committee did not want a barrage of cameras confronting the young people before or after the meeting.

Parliamentary Debate

6. The Committee bid for a morning session of Parliament to debate its report and, in order to ensure that the debate was as meaningful as possible, the Committee took the innovative decision to hold a seminar based event to which it invited members of the Gypsy Traveller community and those involved in the provision of services to discuss the Scottish Executive's response to the Committee's report.

7. The event brought together participants from organisations working with and representing the Gypsy Traveller communities, Gypsy Travellers themselves, including young Gypsy Travellers, members of the housing, education and social services departments of local authorities, personnel from the health services, MSPs and Scottish Executive officials.

8. Prior to the event, written submissions were invited from all interested parties to help inform the discussions which were carried out in workshop groups facilitated by Members of the Equal Opportunities Committee. Following the workshop discussions, each group brought forward a set of recommendations agreed by the members of the workshop group to the plenary session, where they were voted on.

9. A formal report of the event was published prior to the Parliamentary debate on the Committee's inquiry report.

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Example 3

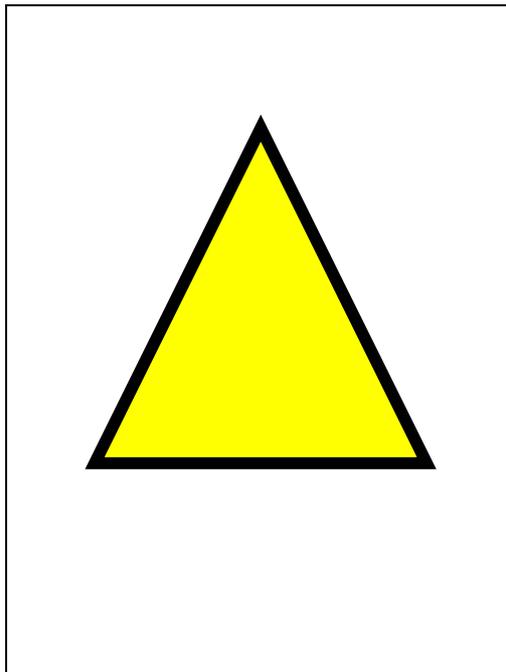
Showing the “Yellow Card”

All participants are provided with a sheet of yellow or coloured A4 paper, either in pack beforehand or on registration.

At the start of the proceedings, explain that the meeting or event would like all speakers to avoid jargon or acronyms etc where possible – or explain them if they do.

Invite the audience to help with this by waving a “Yellow Card” whenever they don’t understand any jargon or language. You could use yellow paper or the traffic type of sign below.

This avoids people having to speak up when they might feel embarrassed at not knowing, and also creates a bit of fun! It’s not always one way - sometimes it is the “experts” who also use the card because they don’t understand some local terminology or shorthand.



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Example 4

Procedures Committee Inquiry into Oral Questions

1. Background

Whilst the issue of oral questions can be seen as a technical issue, oral questions are one of the most publicly recognised areas of Parliamentary business. As such it was seen that it was appropriate and would assist the committee considerations to obtain views from the wider public on this issue in addition to evidence.

2. Project Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this initiative was to try and obtain useful evidence on a technical issue from groups who were not part of the existing consultation network.

Objectives included targeting groups with a variation of interests and a geographic spread; to provide an education input and a visit to Parliament for participants to enable them to understand the issues being considered in the committee's inquiry; and to work through locally based community workers.

3. The Groups Involved

Six groups from Greenock, West Lothian, Easterhouse, Edinburgh, Moray and Dumfries & Galloway(62 people) took part. They represented single parents, local activists on university access courses, active disability and mental health groups, a community partnership and an anti-poverty group.

4. The Process Involved

This was carried out in four stages which ran to a tight timetable over 3 – 4 weeks

Stage 1 Briefing Session run by clerks for the tutors/ group workers covering: the key functions of the Parliament, the function and role of oral questions, the questions the committee was interested in. A video was made of the briefing for those workers from Dumfries and Moray, to reduce the time and cost of them being involved. An Information pack was made available.

Stage 2 An Education Session run by the group workers for their group on the role of oral questions, and the questions the committee was interested in.

Stage 3 Group Visit to Parliament to see Oral Questions in the chamber. The groups met each other and then had another short briefing from the clerks about what would happen in the chamber and the different types of questions that would come up in the chamber. Lunch was provided.

Stage 4 Discussion and Submission of Evidence .Once back home, the group workers then organised another session with the group and gathered their responses to the specific questions and areas in which the committee had an interest in for the purposes of the inquiry. This was submitted as evidence.

The group workers and tutors were responsible for attending the briefing session, organizing the two education and discussion sessions, travel and childcare arrangements, and submitting written evidence to the committee. Civic Participation budget covered childcare, travel and worker's time.

5. Outcomes

This initiative was reasonably successful in meeting our aim and objectives. The initiative produced useful and interesting written evidence although the tight timetable presented difficulty for half of them who produced a report at a later date.

6. Feedback from Participants

Each group leader was asked to fill in a short evaluation form to give an indication of the way we had organised the initiative and the value of the process for the groups participating. For a full report contact Participation Services or the Procedures Committee. [\(Back to main document\)](#)

7. Quotes from Evaluation

The feedback showed that the briefing sessions and information provided to the groups was crucial in preparing them for the visit to Parliament and their subsequent discussions.

"We felt this was good, plenty of written information before the visit as well as a video of the briefing session - we knew what to expect when we got there."

"This was a really useful process- it allowed the facilitators to meet each other and the have the opportunity to discuss with clerks the remit for the visit".

"The visit to the Scottish Parliament was a fantastic experience for all the people who participated. They found this an excellent opportunity to see first hand the political and democratic processes that operate within the parliament. It also allowed them to meet with several MSPs and discuss oral questioning in the chamber and their views on this".

"Extremely valuable, especially as we come from a rural area and it is easy for people to feel divorced from the central belt and the centre of power where decisions are made. Many of our group live on a very low income and have a lack of opportunities generally, so they found it extremely powerful and empowering to feel their voice might make a difference in such a big arena. It was a very big boost to the confident levels of all those that attended on lots of different levels. We will be taking a report of the day back to the wider MAP (Moray Against Poverty) network and copies of our report are being distributed in Moray."

"The group talked about the experience all the way home from Edinburgh to Dumfries. The experience has been of great value to the group. Two of the members had shown no interest in politics previous to the visit and one of the members expressed how they only voted in local elections and this created a debate with others. This also raised issues on how organised or disorganised their own group were in dealing with meetings in which they participate.

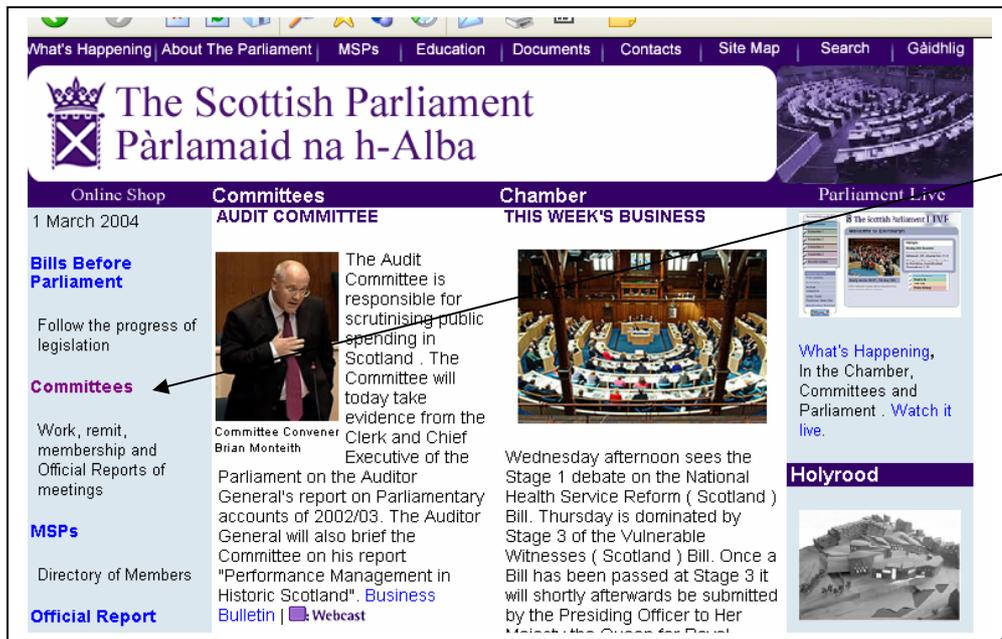
"I found it very valuable indeed. To see the beginnings of real interest in the working of democratic processes and the work of the Scottish Parliament in folks who probably would not usually have that connection was great to see. It really opened the eyes of many of our group and helped them put some of the things they experienced locally into a wider perspective"

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Example 5

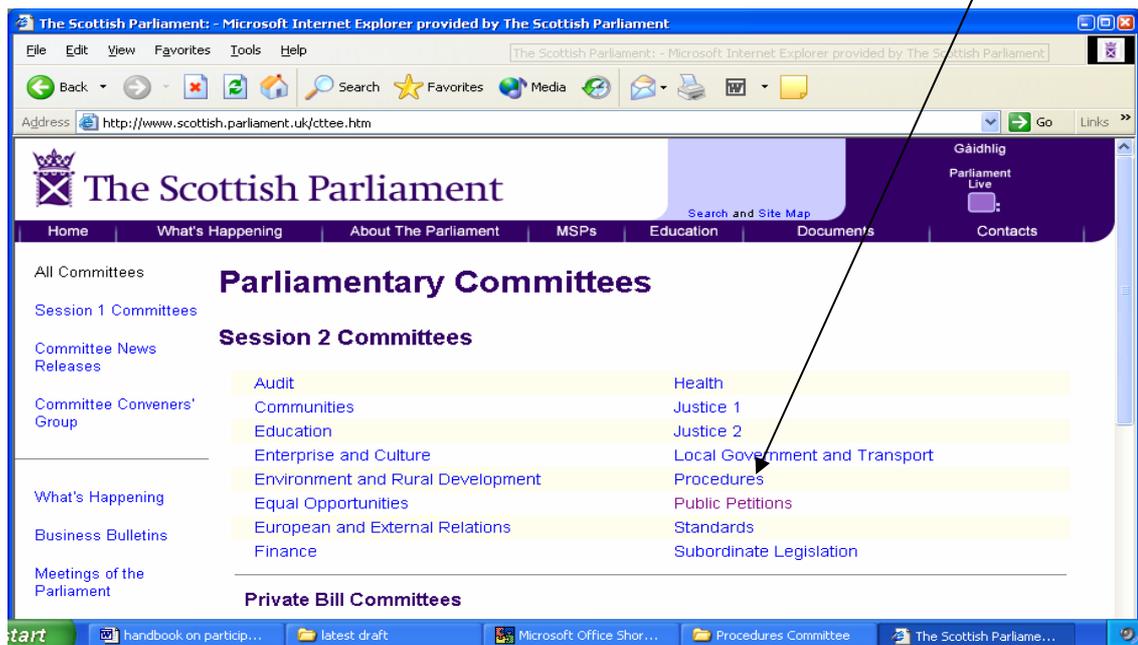
Information given to community participants after they had submitted their evidence (Procedures Committee)

Your submissions will be contained in the *committee papers* which the Committee members will read before their next meeting on Tuesday 18th November. All the Committee Papers and Reports are published on the website, so you can see your submission there at any time- www.scottish.parliament.uk.



1. Click onto Committees

2. Then click onto Procedures Committee



Address <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/procedures/index.htm>

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Mark Ballard
Bruce Crawford
Cathie Craigie
Karen Gillon (Deputy Convener)
Mr Jamie McGrigor

Bills **Committee Substitutes:**

Linda Fabiani
Robin Harper
Irene Oldfather
Mr Keith Raffan
Murray Tosh

Remit

The remit of the Procedures Committee is to consider and report on the practice and procedures of the Parliament in relation to its business.

Clerk: Andrew Mylne
Contact: Lewis McNaughton, 0131 348 5178
Mailbox: Procedures.Committee@scottish.parliament.uk

Reports and Inquiries 2004

February 3rd Report 2004: [Suspension of Standing Orders](#)

30 January 2nd Report 2004: [Emergency Bills](#)

30 January 1st Report 2004: [Oral Questions and Time in the Chamber](#)

Meetings 2004 (Session 2)

4th Meeting	2 March 2004
Papers (pdf)	Papers 4
Official Report	
Minute of Proceedings	
3rd Meeting	10 February 2004
Papers (pdf)	Papers 3
Official Report	3rd Meeting, 2004 Non-Executive Bills Private Bills Procedure Legislation Inquiry
Minute of Proceedings	3rd Meeting, 2004

Standing Orders of the Scottish Parliament

The Parliament's procedures are primarily governed by the Standing Orders. These Rules are revised from time to time. The current version may be accessed below in two formats: the PDF version is printable and mirrors the paper document, whereas the HTML version provides a more user-friendly format.

- [Standing Orders c 600kb pdf](#)
- [Standing Orders c 600kb pdf](#)

3. Now scroll down under Meetings 2003 (Session 2) to find Meeting of 18th Nov – Meeting 7.

If you click on Papers 7 you will get the Agenda and then the second page will list all the papers. Click on the paper called written submission or evidence.

4. The Committee will produce a report of its findings sometime in December. To find this, use this same page and go to Reports and Inquiries.

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Example 6

Enterprise and Culture Committee

Brainstorming Solutions Workshop on the impact of the proposed introduction of University top-up fees in England.

This Workshop was organised by the Scottish Council Foundation to try to generate potential solutions in relation to the issue.

Participants

All participants were selected in a personal capacity, not as representing their employer or anyone else. In general the major stakeholders in higher education were not invited. The concept of the day was to take those with an external knowledge of higher education, but no direct stake, to take an independent view and come up with potential solutions. In general invitees are not those who head up organisations, and would be particularly identified with them, but practitioners within organisations. Three MSPs, chosen by the Enterprise and Culture Committee, were also be involved, in an observer capacity.

The Format

The day began with an explanation of the implications of the introduction of top-up fees for Scottish higher education and the potential problems that this may create, followed by any questions. Participants then broke into 3 'solution groups' whose task was to find a number of potential solutions to the problem which they are asked to address. Each group had 5 members and an MSP from the Enterprise and Culture Committee, who will be an observer.

As this was a brainstorming session, there were no 'bad' solutions at this stage. The groups were pre-selected to include a range of background and experience amongst members. They each had a specified leader, but could address the task in any way they wish. Staff from The Scottish Council Foundation were on hand to assist groups if necessary. The groups had almost 2 hours to devise their solutions.

Towards the end of this period the whole group with the exception of the leader shuffled around to the next group. The group leader that they left behind then had to explain their solutions to the new group, who ask questions and make sure that the proposals are clear. At the end of this process the solution groups came together and the leader from each reported back to the main group. The report-back was a range of potential solutions with explanations of them. The rest of the main group then had a chance to question and clarify the proposals.

Outcome

The outcome from the day was a list of potential solutions to the identified problems. The technical output was a note of these prepared by the MSPs/committee clerks, which became a formal Enterprise and Culture Committee paper and was reported back to the Committee at its following meeting. The material was taken into account by the Committee when it considered its report on the inquiry in November/December.

Enterprise and Culture Committee 26 August 2003 ([Back to main document](#))