



Title: Community Engagement: Practical Lessons from a Pilot Project (Home Office Development and Practice Report 48)

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SCS topic headings: Community Engagement, Evaluation and Monitoring, Safety in Public Spaces (ASB), Environment Safety (ASB)

[This document is a REVIEW of effective intervention approaches.](#)

Summary of the intervention's aim

This report is intended as a resource for practitioners setting up mechanisms to engage local communities in community safety activities. It draws on lessons from a pilot community engagement project.

One East Midland's city formed nine Community Safety Groups (CSGs) to engage local people with relevant service providers in order to identify and tackle crime and disorder issues in their areas. In 2004 Government Office for the East Midlands commissioned a project through which three different consultants worked with the CSGs for one year to enhance the level of community engagement within these groups and support them in identifying and tackling local problems.

Outcomes

A process evaluation of this project highlighted a number of practical lessons. The topics and key practice messages/recommendations which are discussed in this report are highlighted below:

- **The definition of community engagement-** Ensure that 'community engagement' is defined and understood by all stakeholders at the outset.
- **Clarifying who to engage and why-** Ensure that the aims of any engagement are clear, and be clear about who should be involved and why.
- **Methods of community engagement-** Community engagement can be achieved through either inward-facing or outward-facing approaches. The effectiveness of each approach will depend on who is to be engaged and why; the methods of

engagement need to be tailored to its purpose; a combination of inward-facing and outward-facing methods will help to obtain a broader picture of the issues that need addressing.

- **Accountability and community engagement-** Define clear accountability structures; create capacity for communities to get involved so that they are able to hold service providers to account; develop community meeting structures, agendas and protocols.
- **Maximising community involvement-** Be realistic about the time and resources required to achieve effective community engagement; provide resources that will assist those attempting to engage members of the community; be realistic about what can be achieved through community engagement and be prepared to deal with the unexpected; effective organisation of community engagement processes is essential to its success.

The processes of engaging communities can be many and complex; any engagement activity needs to be managed efficiently. The evaluation found that the organisation of the Community Safety Groups was critical to their success. Furthermore, the management of community expectations is essential; in particular, it is important to be honest about the extent to which contributions might realistically influence practice on the ground. This evaluation found that failure to do so can result in frustration and risks creating disengagement.

Summary of evaluation conclusions

At the end of the evaluation period, it was clear that the Community Safety Groups and the consultants found the process of achieving community engagement a challenging task. The lessons discussed in this report suggest that the more flexible, transparent and organised initiatives are in engaging communities, especially in being clear about why they are trying to engage with local people to begin with, the easier it will be for communities to make valuable contributions and make a real difference to their neighbourhoods.

When setting up community engagement mechanisms practitioners may like to consider the following points:

- Clearly define what is meant by ‘community engagement’ and ensure that this is understood by all stakeholders at the outset
- Consider using a combination of inward-facing and outward-facing methods to obtain a broader picture of the issues that need addressing
- Inward-facing methods involve engaging local communities in meetings with service providers to tackle local crime and disorder. Alternatively, outward-facing methods involve engaging with local communities outside of formal meetings. The effectiveness of each approach will depend on being clear about who is to be engaged and why

- Define clear accountability structures for community engagement. Create capacity for communities to get involved so that they are able to hold service providers to account
- Effective organisation of community engagement processes is essential for gaining maximum involvement
- Be realistic about the time and resources needed to achieve effective community engagement as well as what can be achieved overall.

How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions

This guidance is based upon the findings from literature review evidence. These sources are both from governmental publications and academic publications. The document lists reference to these in the final pages under the 'further information' and 'references' section.

**Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request.
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