

**Quality Improvement Toolkit
For Tenants & Residents and
Community Groups**

INTRODUCTION

This toolkit has been produced to assist and provide information for people who wish to develop the quality of a Tenants & Residents Association or Community Group.

Support with quality improvement can be given to new and established groups by the Mansfield Community Development Project as part of its commitment to developing sustainable communities through Community Development. This booklet is just one part of the Project's strategy to support the Community in taking positive action to change the environment in which they live.

CIVIC stands for 'Cultural and Industrial Values in Change'. CIVIC was a two-year (2005-2006) European-funded project, that took place in Jokkmokk, Sweden and in Mansfield. CIVIC was designed to:

Develop and introduce a system for continuous improvement of our community based on the theory and values of Total Quality Management (TQM) and the application of TQM tools.

This toolkit has been adapted from the CIVIC Quality Enthusiasts Sourcebook, also available from the Mansfield Community Development Project (CDP).

The Mansfield CDP can be contacted on (01623) 642304 or by e-mail to: peter.clarke@nottsc.gov.uk

1. QUALITY CIRCLE

Organisations use Quality Circles to bring together people working at each stage of a process in order to pool knowledge and create an atmosphere where improvement ideas can be explored. Tenants & Residents Associations, community groups, organisations and partnerships can set up a Quality Circle to bring together people who are working on various aspects of the community's development.

A Quality Circle can provide opportunities to explore improvement ideas, to pool local knowledge and to challenge assumptions. This can involve residents and service providers, including local politicians.

There are no strict rules about how to organise a Quality Circle. Quality Circles usually consist of between 6 and 12 participants. The group can be self-organising and self-managing, although most benefit from the guidance and support of a leader or facilitator. Additional 'outside' (expert) training and assistance will also be helpful.

Quality Circles are intended to support 'continuous improvement', and this happens best in an atmosphere where trust is built and where there is no blame.

Participants in Quality Circles:

- Take part voluntarily
- Opt in to attending regular meetings
- Sometimes deliver a presentation to the rest of the group
- Take opportunities to network and build partnerships

It is recommended that the group is kept small enough to ensure all members can contribute effectively. Members are expected to agree on a clear plan (agenda) and purpose (objective) for each meeting.

The group may choose to start by identifying problematic situations and situations that they feel could benefit from improvement. If the solutions and improvements suggested by the Quality Circle are to be implemented (and the results studied), the active cooperation of those in positions of authority to enact these ideas is essential. This is known as 'top-level buy in'. If the suggestions are to be successful they also require the

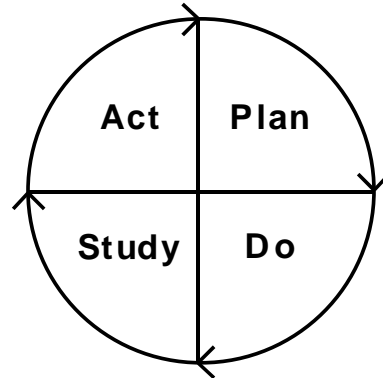
support of all of those involved. This is known as 'bottom-up participation'.

2.

IMPROVEMENT CYCLE

Quality improvement can be seen as a continuous process that repeats itself in a cycle. Various models have been developed to help explain these improvement cycles. The PDSA cycle begins with Planning and Doing. Results are then Studied, and used to inform subsequent Action. The SUDA cycle is similarly made up of Sensing and Understanding phases that lead to Deciding and taking Action.

PDSA stands for Plan → Do → Study → Act → The cycle starts with planning (e.g. planning the improvement project), based upon an idea of what should be improved. The next step is to execute the test that has been planned (doing). The results of any tests (or 'trial runs', pilot studies, etc.) should be studied. Finally, in the Acting phase, decisions are made, based on the results of the study undertaken.



Some are confused by the concept of continuous improvement, saying that if something is 'perfect' it cannot be improved; if it's not broken, why fix it? Even if processes do exactly what they were designed to do, it is unlikely that doing the same thing will continue to meet people's needs. The only way to ensure that a process (or an organisation) continues to meet changing needs is to review on a regular basis.

Using these improvement cycle models to think about how a group makes decisions and takes action is a way to slow things down (to reflect and consider options and alternatives) to speed things up (become more effective).

This process includes:

- Describing the current situation in its context and in relation to visions of how things (groups, communities, etc.) could be
- Looking at the gap between how things are and how we want them to be
- Generating ideas about how to bridge that gap
- Developing these ideas into a plan
- Implementing this plan
- Evaluating the results
- Redrafting the plans in light of real outcomes

3.

PEST ANALYSIS / ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

One method used by organisations to understand the environment within which they operate is known as PEST Analysis, because it looks at influential Political, Economic, Social and Technological factors. This approach is also known as an Environmental Scan (or 'Environmental Audit').

Politics affects organisations and neighbourhoods in many ways. Changes in political control can influence public priorities and funding arrangements. All organisations are governed by laws set by Parliament, and are therefore dependant upon political considerations.

The state of the economy affects all organisations, commercial or otherwise. Economic growth is considered an indicator of increased demand. If demand is to increase, organisations need to plan for expansion.

Socio-cultural factors affect the make-up of the population and the lifestyles of society. The social and cultural environments are constantly changing. Identifying trends will assist with planning for the future.

Technological changes have had a profound impact on all of us, at home and at work. Technological change is considered to have rapid, persistent and profound effects on our lives.

This approach to environmental scanning can contribute to managing social change and enhancing the quality of community development in several ways.

PEST Analysis:

- Describes a starting point for discussion and analysis
- Draws on people's sense of 'what is really going on'
- Provides information about the origins of the current situation
- Contributes to a better understanding of 'what we're up against' (challenges faced and barriers to be overcome)
- Enhances the local knowledge economy, helping identify local solutions and previously unrecognised opportunities
- Helps identify unintended consequences (of past actions)
- Can be easily linked to SUDA and PDSA cycles of continuous improvement

4.

BRAIN STORMING

*Brainstorming** is a quick and simple way for a group of people to generate a large number of ideas. Impractical ideas are not excluded, but are seen as useful contributions that could lead to more practical ideas.

There is no one 'correct' way to Brainstorm. What is most important to remember is that everyone's contributions are to be treated as equally valid, and all ideas must be recorded. Once all of the ideas have been recorded those involved in the Brainstorming session move on to eliminate or adapt the ideas considered unlikely to work.

The process of Brainstorming usually begins with an issue, problem or focus (or simply a title) that is written on a board or flipchart. A facilitator, or 'scribe', is selected to record people's responses. Group members call out ideas that address the issue, and all of these ideas are written down. These ideas should not be criticised by any of the participants. This non-judgemental attitude is meant to encourage creative thinking and risk-taking, which in turn can lead to building trust within the group. Brainstormers are often encouraged to 'think the unthinkable'.

*Note: The term 'brainstorming' as used in this context has nothing to do with epilepsy. To avoid this confusion some people use the term 'thought-shower' instead.

5. AFFINITY DIAGRAMS

Affinity diagrams are a way of sorting ideas, problems or issues into related groups. Affinity diagrams are usually constructed by a team of people. The team identifies the possible issues, problems or ideas, for example by Brainstorming. Each issue, problem or idea identified is recorded on a separate card or Post-it note. The cards or notes are laid out randomly, and the team groups each of the cards or notes, moving those that they do not agree with until everyone is happy with the grouping. A short description is then produced for each grouping. Finally, the team identifies how the headings relate to each other.

6.

FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS

Force-Field Analysis provides a way to represent and explore the combination of positive (driving or reinforcing) forces and negative (restraining or limiting) forces that impact on a particular area of focus.

Force-Field Analysis can be used to help an organisation or group see positive aspects to maintain and negative aspects to be dealt with. This activity often leads to animated discussions, helping participants gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of the issue.

A title, representing the process being analysed, is drawn down the centre of a sheet. Drivers and barriers are then added, drawn as arrows pointing towards the central shape. Positive forces (drivers) are drawn from one side and negative forces (barriers) from the other. To give additional detail the arrows can be 'weighted' (drawn in proportion to their influence on the process).

An example of a Force-Field Diagram

Driving Forces

- Lack of affordable childcare →
- Disability, illness (mental illness) →
- Poor health (receipt of incapacity benefit a possible disincentive) →
- Lack of jobs →
- Large employers pushing out small firms →
- Lack of enterprise culture →
- Unattractive (low paid) jobs →
- Poverty trap wages / benefits →
- Employer prejudices (including risk aversion) →
- Lack of education, training, qualifications, work experience →
- Lack of ICT skills (digital divide) →
- Transportation problems (no car) →
- Lack of self-confidence (residents) →
- Lack of role models →
- Self-image issues - lack of aspiration →
- Break-down of family / societal support →
- Transient population →
- Labour being brought in from outside the area →
- Poor match between jobs and skills →
- Short-term contracts →

30% - 40% of the population

Restraining Forces

- ← National schemes and inter-agency cooperation (Working Family Tax Credits)
- ← Neighbourhood Renewal / Neighbourhood Management Teams' action plans
- ← Other regional and sub-regional schemes (New Deal for Communities)
- ← Various local and county-wide schemes (Welcome to Working in Retail / Childcare, Bridge to Work)
- ← Social enterprises Support for childcare (Surestart)
- ← Social stigma attached to unemployment
- ← Vocational training
- ← Voluntary experience
- ← Disability Discrimination Act, employment law
- ← Minimum wage
- ← Negotiations with employers → contracts that guarantee local workforce
- ← Potential workers (residents) feeling valued
- ← Business investment

7.

VISIONING

An important part of addressing a planning gap is the need for clear and agreed visions of what the group wishes to achieve, or of the situation that the group wishes to bring about (or prevent). Visions need to be anchored in the project's governing ideas.

Building a shared vision is only part of a larger activity that also includes developing the purpose of the project, and identifying its core values. Vision, purpose and values combine to constitute a venture's governing ideas.

Vision: What is the future we seek to create?
Purpose: Why does this project exist?
Core Values: How do we want to act?
 What are our guiding principles?

Visions spread because there is a reinforcing process of increasing clarity, enthusiasm, communication and commitment. As people talk, the vision grows clearer and enthusiasm for the benefits build up. When people in an organisation learn how existing policies and actions are creating their current reality the quality of the vision improves.

Some common pitfalls have been identified:

- If there is great urgency to sign up for a new vision, people may not realise that there is time to really talk and listen to each other.
- Once people stop asking: What do we want to create? and just repeat an official version, the quality of the ongoing conversation begins to decay.
- If the spirit of connection that underlies the shared vision breaks down, we lose respect for each other and each other's views.

It is also worth noting that many visions do not take root even though they have merit

8.

PQASSO

An important way to manage quality is through some sort of self-assessment. This involves making an evaluation based on thinking about strengths and areas for improvement. These reflections are recorded and used to monitor attempts to improve.

Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations (PQASSO) provides a framework that enables voluntary and community groups (and projects) to review the quality of their organisation and the services they provide, and then to undertake improvements.

PQASSO has helped many groups to:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Boost confidence
- Establish sound financial systems
- Build information databases
- Improve the facilitation of committee meetings
- Produce and distribute promotional material
- Develop Health & Safety policies and procedures
- Identify specific issues requiring attention, for example training needs

Points to consider include:

- Volunteer time and commitment
- Volunteers moving on
- Need for open communication
- Need to view this approach as an ongoing process
- Resistance to change, especially if it is seen to involve taking on something extra

USEFUL RESOURCES

Link to CIVIC products

- www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/youandyourcommunity/buildingcommunities/communitydevelopment/communitydevelopmentprojectsinnotts.htm

Links to Quality resources

- Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Voluntary Organisations (PQASSO)
www.ces-vol.org.uk/index.cfm?pg=42
- Quality and Adult Learning (can be adapted for community development)
www.qualityacl.org.uk/quality/t2_Resource.aspx
www.qualityacl.org.uk/quality/publications.aspx
- Support for Success Quality improvement practice guides
www.s4s.org.uk/index.php?mod=page&page=home&id=108
- Jane Owen's *Making quality sense*
www.lsd.org.uk/files/PDF/1201A.pdf
- Brighton Resource Centre *Systems for improving your organisation: a brief guide to Quality*
www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/policies_procedures/info_pdf/quality.pdf

Links to Community Development resources

- *Strategic Framework for Community Development*
www.cdx.org.uk/resources/library/docs/sframework.doc
- The *infed* (on-line) encyclopaedia of informal education article on community development
www.infed.org/community/b-comwrk.htm
- **The Community Development Foundation (CDF)**
www.cdf.org.uk
- Community Engagement resources
www.communityplanning.org.uk/documents/cptfwg3information-sources.pdf
- Renewal.net Toolkits, for example:
www.renewal.net/Documents/RNET/Overview/How%20To/Buildpartnership.doc
- NIACE *Emancipatory Learning Briefing Sheet*
www.niace.org.uk/information/Briefing_sheets/Emancipatorylearningmar00.html
- *Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation*
www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/ideas.htm
- *Evaluating community projects: A practical guide*
www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/eBooks/1859354157.pdf