



Galway City Community Network
Líonra Pobail Chathair na Gaillimhe

Guidelines for Successful **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

GALWAY CITY COMMUNITY NETWORK
—— **POLICY ON PARTICIPATION,** ——
REPRESENTATION AND CONSULTATION





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Líonra Pobail Chathair na Gaillimhe

PREAMBLE

Galway City Community Network would like to thank all those that contributed to the development of this paper, *Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement*. This is an important document for GCCN as it outlines our belief in, and commitment to, participation, informed representation and meaningful consultation. We believe in the right of people and communities to engage with decision-making and policy development that affects their lives and we also believe that they contribute to better decisions better policies.

We trust that this document will make a positive contribution to the evolving relationship between GCCN and its partners, including Galway City Council.

Tommy Flaherty, on behalf of Galway City Community Network.

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Section 1. Introduction

Galway City Community Network (GCCN) is the network of community, voluntary and environmental organisations and groups active in Galway City. As the Public Participation Network¹ for Galway City, GCCN is the main link through which the local authority and state agencies connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City.

GCCN VISION

The GCCN vision for Galway City is ***Galway, a creative and inclusive city that respects and values its people and communities, their wellbeing and quality of life, that will develop a vibrant, sustainable, economy and environment and participative and transparent governance.***

GCCN VALUES

The shared values that motivate and guide the priorities that GCCN pursues are:

- Sustainability - including valuing, preserving and protecting the natural environment.
- Equality - including working in a non-discriminatory way, valuing and respecting diversity, empowering people, and securing people's access to social and economic resources.
- Culture - including valuing, empowering, and fostering the diversity of cultures in the city and enabling people to express their creativity.

- Community – involving the physical space, identity, and/or interests shared by a group, where people enjoy wellbeing and harmony, organise collectively, and engage in shared creativity.
- Empowerment – including representation and participation in decision-making and democracy in the city.
- Inclusion – involving fostering and ensuring a sense of belonging to and opportunities to engage with one's community and the city.

GCCN PURPOSE

Galway City Community Network is committed to the principles of community development – social change, collectivity, empowerment, social justice and sustainable development, human rights, equality and anti-discrimination, and participation – as underpinning all GCCN work.

The twin objectives that GCCN pursues are to:

- Advance the values of sustainability, equality, culture, community, empowerment and inclusivity and embed these in the policies, programmes and practice of local government, state organisations, national government and civil society.
- Develop and implement progressive models of and approaches to representation, participation and engagement for civil society in informing and shaping policy making and programme development.

GCCN ROLE

The role of Galway City Community Network is to:

- Act as a platform for the groups/organisations engaged in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City to develop policy and positions on issues of common concern to the sectors and to communities and to advocate for these policies and positions to be implemented.
- Facilitate the representation of the community, voluntary and environmental sectors on the Local Community Development Committee, the Strategic Policy Committees, the Joint Policing Committee, other local government and local development bodies and any local, regional, national or international body deemed appropriate by Galway City Community Network.
- Contribute to the development and achievement of a vision for the well-being of this and future generations.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

GCCN is particularly concerned with the promotion of meaningful and effective participation of communities in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. GCCN is deeply committed to the principles of participation, representation and consultation as we believe that:

- It is the right of people to participate in decisions and policies that affect them and their communities.
- The participation of people and communities benefit and improve decision-making and policy development.

GCCN opposes tokenistic forms of participation, representation and consultation.

Section 2. Policy Context

Galway City Community Network presents this brief paper on *Guidelines for Successful Community Engagement* as a positive contribution to the evolving relationships between the network and its partners, including Galway City Council. Here we set out our expectations of participation, representation and consultation that form the basis for the GCCN terms of engagement with representative structures and consultation processes. Galway City Community Network's belief in, and commitment to the importance of participation, representation and consultation is underpinned and supported by a range of national and international policies and other instruments.

The United Nations, for example, states that political and public participation rights play a crucial role in the promotion of democratic governance, the rule of law, social inclusion and economic development, as well as in the advancement of all human rights. The right to directly and indirectly participate in political and public life is important in empowering individuals and groups, and is one of the core elements of human rights-based approaches aimed at eliminating marginalization and discrimination. Participation rights are inextricably linked to other human rights such as the rights to peaceful assembly and association, freedom of expression and opinion and the rights to education and to information².

¹ Public Participation Networks (PPNs) were established in each local authority area in Ireland as part of the process local government reform under the Local Government Reform Act 2014

² United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner – <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/EqualParticipation.aspx>



The right to participate on a basis of equality in public and political life is a central feature of the concept of inclusive democracy³. The effective participation of all individuals and groups in political and public affairs underpins the realization of human rights and forms a central component of rights-based strategies aimed at eradicating discrimination and inequalities⁴.

Increasingly, international human rights mechanisms are acknowledging the rights of all people to be fully involved in and to effectively influence public decision-making processes. These public participation rights encompass the rights to be consulted at each phase of legislative drafting and policymaking, to voice criticism and to submit proposals aimed at improving the functioning and inclusivity of all governmental bodies engaged in the conduct of public affairs. This wider interpretation of the right to political and public participation is particularly apparent in relation to the rights of persons with disabilities and in connection with indigenous peoples, minorities and the role of civil society organizations⁵.

At a national level, Ireland is a member of The Open Government Partnership (OGP)⁶. As part of this international initiative, every two years, Ireland makes commitments to make the State ever more transparent, ever more accountable and ever more inclusive in how it reaches decisions. The first OGP National Action Plan was launched in 2014⁷. The commitments in the National Action Plan span three core areas, one of which is to build citizen participation. It commits to greater citizen consultation and involvement to strengthen democracy and improve public services, in the belief that this is essential to the functioning of government institutions and economic growth⁸. Meaningful participation increases the legitimacy of public decision-making, improves citizens' knowledge and awareness of complex policy challenges, helps decision-makers to make better decisions and can lead to the improvement in the quality of service provision⁹.

As part of the OGP National Action Plan, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform published Guidance for Public Consultation. The principles that underpin those include:

- Consultation with citizens must be genuine, meaningful, timely, balanced and with the ultimate objective of leading to better outcomes and greater understanding by all involved of the benefits and consequences of proceeding with particular policy or legislation proposals. Consultation should aim to achieve real engagement and 'real listening' rather than being a pro-forma exercise for bureaucratic purposes. A genuine consultation process ensures that the real-world impact of policy options is considered.
- Consultation should be targeted at and easily accessible to those with a clear interest in the policy in question. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to consultation. The size, type and scope of the consultative process depends on the proposed policy, the type and scale of the potential impacts of the proposal or decision being taken, the number of people or groups affected by them, and where relevant particular requirements of the child and young people and those who may be marginalised or vulnerable.
- Government departments and agencies should make systematic efforts to ensure that interested and affected parties have the opportunity to take part in open consultations at all stages of the policy process on significant policy, services and legislative matters: development, implementation, evaluation, and review.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 introduced a duty on the public sector that should bring a focus on non-discrimination, equality and human rights centre-stage in their planning, policy-making, employment, service provision and procurement. It is a legal requirement that requires public bodies, which includes all bodies, groups and organisations

³ See the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 21; Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 25 (1996), para. 21; and A/HRC/22/29, paras. 7–9.

⁴ UN General Assembly 2014. Factors that impede equal political participation and steps to overcome those challenges Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

⁵ Ibid

⁶ The Open Government Partnership is an initiative of 70 countries. It aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. It is run by a steering committee composed of governments and civil society organisations.

⁷ Ireland is currently developing its second National Action Plan that will include commitments and actions to achieve three central aims: Increased Citizen Engagement; Increased Transparency and Open Data; Strengthened Governance and Accountability

⁸ Department of Public Expenditure & Reform Draft Consultation Principles/Guidance for Public Consultation.

⁹ Ibid



in receipt of public funding to have regard to the need to promote equality, protect human rights and prohibit discrimination for employees and people accessing public services in carrying out their functions. In this context, the participation of people from the target population who experience inequality or who have human rights concerns is an important element in the implementation of a positive duty. This participation informs impact assessments and, at a later stage, informs any reviews of policies and programmes. Effective participation strategies ensure that this participation leads to clearly identifiable equality and human rights outcomes rather than being consultation for consultation sake. Effective participation strategies employ a variety of methods to engage the most isolated, vulnerable and socially excluded groups¹⁰.

In establishing Public Participation Networks in each local authority area, the government acknowledged that the participation of citizens¹¹ in public life and their right to influence the decisions that affect their lives and communities are at the centre of democracy. Open and

inclusive policy-making increased public participation, enhances transparency and accountability, builds civic capacity and leads to increased buy-in and better decision-making¹². The PPN User Guide describes PPNs as the 'go to' organisation for all bodies on a county/city who wish to benefit from community and voluntary expertise.

However, GCCN is aware that participation, representation and consultation are not always straightforward. As Dr Chris McInerney stated in his submission in response to the Public Consultation Process on Principles to Guide Public Engagement on Policy and Services Development,

it cannot be stated strongly enough that while the existence of guidelines [for participation and engagement] are important, it is the capacity and willingness to do something meaningful with them that counts most.

Section 3. Facilitating participation, representation & consultation

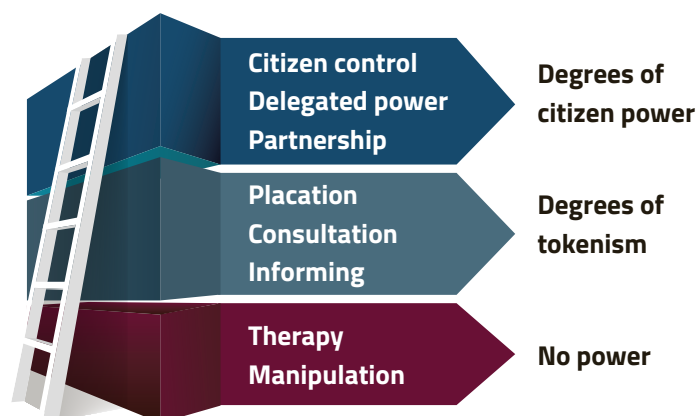
As stated, GCCN is deeply committed to the principles of participation, representation and consultation as we believe that:

- It is the right of people to participate in decisions and policies that affect them and their communities;
- The participation of a people and communities benefit and improve decision-making and policy development.

GCCN believes that participation of citizens and residents should be respected as a right. It should avoid tokenism and be pitched at a level where there is honest engagement by all partners.

GCCN representation is underpinned and supported by systems that have been designed to ensure maximum participation and good practice in relation to consultation.

ARNSTEIN (1969) LADDER OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION



¹⁰ 2011. Setting out the case for a public sector positive duty: A briefing paper by the Equality & Rights Alliance

¹¹ Galway City Community Network uses the term citizen in a way that encompasses all residents and members of the community, irrespective of their legal status.

¹² Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government

¹³ Department of Environment, Community & Local Government - Public Participation Networks: A User Guide

PARTICIPATION

Plenary Meetings

GCCN holds Plenary (membership) meetings four times annually – one of which is the GCCN Annual General Meeting. These are the most important of GCCN meetings. The Plenary meetings provide the opportunity to:

- Report on progress/work undertaken;
- Discuss issues of importance and interest to GCCN;
- Take positions and pass motions where necessary;
- Plan for future work;
- Elect replacement representatives where necessary;
- Network and exchange information

Linkage Groups

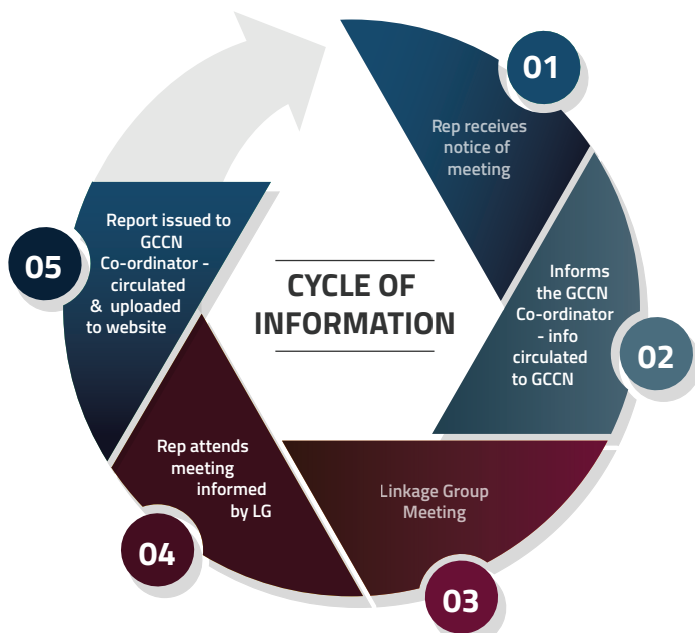
Linkage Groups are subgroups of Galway City Community Network that are convened on a thematic basis. The Linkage Groups discuss and develop GCCN policy, support the GCCN representatives in the thematic area and provide the platform for electing replacement representatives as appropriate.

GCCN representatives are required to be members of and attend Linkage Group meetings.

Linkage Groups meet and discuss agenda items before representatives attend meetings and agreed a position where necessary. Representatives are then required to report back to the Linkage Groups and to the GCCN membership at Plenary meetings. Enabling and facilitating this type of representation takes time and requires that sufficient notice is given of meetings to allow for these to be arranged.

Information & Communication

Information and communication is key to the effectiveness of Galway City Community Network. GCCN continues to operate the cycle of information. This entails notice of upcoming meetings at which GCCN is represented with an invitation to submit comments or issues to raise being circulated to the GCCN membership.



These are then circulated to the GCCN representatives who, following the meeting, issue a report of the meeting for circulation to the membership and publication on the GCCN website.

Consultation

Galway City Community Network has developed a model in relation to the development and production of submissions and positions on issues and policies of interest to PPN members. Submissions are prepared after consultation with PPN members, generally through the organisation of a workshop or focus group and sometimes supplemented by an online survey. Drafts of the submission/policy/position are circulated for comments and suggestions before submission. In that way, we aim to facilitate the ownership of submissions, policy and positions.

Representation

Representing the PPN on the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and other structures is an important task. In order to ensure that representation is informed and based on knowledge of the policy area and on commitment to the PPN, the following criteria for PPN representation apply:

- An awareness of general policy in the area you are seeking to represent on;
- A knowledge of the GCCN policies in the area and a commitment to promoting these policies and to policy development where necessary;
- A proven track record in the ability to represent;
- A commitment to attending all meetings of the LCDC or SPC or whichever forum/structure you are elected to sit on;
- A commitment to attend all PPN Plenary Meetings;

- A commitment to convene and attend the Linkage Group relevant to your thematic area;
- A commitment to supporting new representatives should the need arise;
- A commitment to issuing a report on the meetings for circulation by the PPN Co-ordinator.

PPNs: A User Guide states that having PPN representation on a Board or Committee is a huge advantage. It enables the concerns and experiences of the community to be incorporated at an early stage of policy development, leading to more positive outcomes. The processes and structures established by

GCCN to ensure best practice in relation to participation, representation and consultation require adequate notice and time to be assigned to allow them to work effectively. There also needs to be respect and appreciation for the role and contribution of PPN representatives. PPN representatives are required to be knowledgeable in the field that they are representing. They are supported by a wider Linkage Group, largely comprised of people skilled, knowledgeable and committed to the issue. These PPN members and representatives give freely of their experience and expertise on a voluntary basis as they all share a commitment to making Galway City the best the city in which to live.

Section 4: Facilitating Effective Engagement

To enable and support participation, representation and consultation, GCCN requires that its engagement be valued and based on the following principles:

MUTUAL RESPECT - Councillors, officials and stakeholders all have important roles to play in reaching good decisions and developing successful policies and plans. It is critical that there is mutual respect of the different roles. It is important that the role of the Strategic Policy Committees and Local Community Development Committee in policy making and monitoring and reviewing progress is fully respected. As the Public Participation Network in Galway City, GCCN is a recognised social partner in its capacity as the collective voice for the local community, voluntary and environmental sectors – and should be respected as an equal partner in relevant decision making processes.

Strategic Policy Committees formulate, develop, monitor and review policy relating to the authority's functions.

OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY - Openness and transparency need to be at the centre of all consultation processes involving the community, voluntary and environmental sectors. The aim and procedure for developing new policies and strategies must be communicated clearly, including the objective of consultation processes. All relevant information must be made available to the people participating in the consultation, and a reasonable and realistic timeframe must be set in order for them to make an informed contribution. Consultation processes should not be initiated unless there is scope for change within a policy or plan. More time should be invested in participatory planning and equality proofing draft documents before they are put out for consultation

SHARED OWNERSHIP - Shared ownership of new plans and developments can be achieved through involvement of the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in the decision-making process. This can lead to better policies and plans, and in turn more successful implementation processes. To be effective, consultation must be genuine, commence early and continue throughout the decision-making process.

In practical terms, this means the following:

Representation

- Respect for the mandate and contribution of GCCN members, freely given on a voluntary basis;
- All ordinary meetings of the Local Community Development Committee, Strategic Policy Committees, the Joint Policing Committee and other structures and subcommittees on which GCCN is represented should be calendar-dated at the beginning of each year or term. We acknowledge that this is not always possible or that meeting dates sometimes need to be changed or meetings need to be called at short notice. However, this should be the case only in exceptional circumstances and where this is the case, three weeks' notice is essential in order to enable:
 - The GCCN representative to make arrangements to be able to attend;
 - Allow for the organisation of a Linkage Group meeting.
- All meeting documentation should be circulated with the meeting notice. Where additional information is to be circulated, this should be clearly indicated and sent to the representatives at least one week in advance;
- All meetings should begin with a series of introductions.
- Due consideration must be given to members with a disability/disabilities. It is suggested that all boards and committees develop an inclusion policy that specifically outlines how people with a disability are enabled to fully participate.

Consultation

■ INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY FROM THE START:

To be effective consultation needs to commence early in any decision-making process. The choice of consultation should be based on input from key stakeholders and partners, including the GCCN Secretariat, Representatives and Linkage Groups, who will have an understanding of how best to access and involve those people who are most affected by or interested in a potential decision or policy change.

■ REALISTIC TIMEFRAMES:

Proper consultation that allows for meaningful engagement takes time. Under normal circumstances, a minimum of six to ten weeks is needed for groups and organisations in the community, voluntary and environmental sectors. Consulting people at times when the ability to respond is limited should be avoided if at all possible – this would include times such as Christmas and school holidays.

■ MAKE SURE CONSULTATIONS ARE PROPERLY ADVERTISED:

Public events and consultations should be broadly advertised and in good time on websites, radio, local newspapers, newsletters and through GCCN.

■ COMMUNICATE CLEARLY:

Always use straightforward 'plain' language and communicate clearly the purpose of the consultation, methods used, procedure for feedback, and when a decision will be taken on proposals.

■ ADEQUATE INFORMATION:

Make sure that adequate information for people to make an informed contribution is provided. Consider using pre-consultation discussions with key stakeholders, including GCCN Secretariat, Representatives and Linkage Groups to clarify the expectation with regards to the nature and scope of information needed. Keep groups informed and follow-up during and after consultation events.

■ IF EXTERNAL CONSULTANTS ARE INVOLVED:

Seek recommendations of key partners, including the GCCN Secretariat, Representatives and Linkage Groups in drafting the brief for the consultants. If relevant, involve key partners when selecting the consultant.

■ CONSIDER USING A FACILITATOR:

When appropriate, consider using an external facilitator, which can be especially beneficial when dealing with many conflicting viewpoints.

■ GO OUT TO PEOPLE:

Face-to-face meetings are often necessary to supplement written submissions/consultations. Make sure to meet people at times that suit people who have work and social commitments during normal office hours.

■ AVOID CONSULTATION FATIGUE:

Too many consultations can result in consultation fatigue, especially if people participate on a voluntary basis. If in doubt liaise with key stakeholders, including GCCN Secretariat and Representatives.

■ PAY DUE RESPECT TO NATIONAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES:

New policies and strategies at a local and regional level are often developed within the context of national policies and guidelines. If so, such guidelines should be clearly identified, including what constraints these impose on the scope for local decision-making.

■ POST CONSULTATION PHASE:

Take time to identify who has taken part in the consultation process, what viewpoints/comments have been raised and how they have been incorporated into the final document. Outline this information in a written response to the groups and individuals who have taken part in the consultation and advise of the next steps.

GCCN acknowledges that its role in facilitating meaningful engagement with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City. GCCN will:

- Live up to our responsibility as a recognised partner by taking active part in consultations in a positive and constructive manner.
- Work to promote and support participation in consultation processes, especially of hard-to-reach groups.
- Contribute to the best of our ability, while respecting confidential information.
- Seek to be flexible when externally imposed deadlines only allow for less than ideal timeframes for consultation.
- Only put forward policies that have been approved by the wider GCCN membership in a democratic and transparent manner.
- Acknowledge the onus on GCCN representatives to liaise with the GCCN membership and report back on important new initiatives.

