

LSPs and hard to reach groups – issues and tips.

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This short paper follows a workshop held at the LGA where a mix of local authorities and national agencies debated the issue of LSPs and involving hard-to-reach groups. Rather than a guide, the point of doing this paper is to get people involved in developing LSPs to think about:

1. [who are the hard-to-reach](#)
2. [why you should engage with hard-to-reach groups](#)
3. [issues you are likely to face in doing so and](#)
4. [how you can make use of some tips and hints.](#)

We have also added a note on [Community Empowerment Networks and hard-to-reach groups](#) at the end of this paper.

Who are the hard-to-reach?

- There is **no list which defines** who the hard-to-reach are nor would a list be common to every local authority area. In some areas, groups that are traditionally regarded to be difficult to engage are often very well involved with the local scene in other areas. For example, in some areas, the business sector is considered a very hard-to-reach group but in others they are fully involved with the LSP.
- **Be honest** with yourself - are hard-to-reach groups actually hard-to-reach or is it that you have not made sufficient efforts to reach them?
- 'Hard to reach' groups are made up of **individuals**. They may include people who are homeless, drug users, lone parents, asylum seekers and young disaffected people.
- Many of the above individuals may not want to be contacted by 'bureaucracy' and may have opted out because statutory services have let them down.

Why should you engage with hard-to-reach groups?

- **Because you have to!** Many government initiatives expect you to have at least have attempted to consult and engage as widely as possible with all sections of your community.
- It also matters in terms of **local democracy**. Turnout at local government elections continues to be very poor so you (especially councillors) have to think about other ways to strengthen your legitimacy as democratically elected representatives of the community.
- It will **improve your standing** in the community.
- Think of all the things that **you can learn** from those people that do not traditionally involve themselves with council or LSP initiatives.

Issues you are likely to face

- Remember that the people that you think are in hard-to-reach groups don't know this – they see themselves as **individuals**.
- Some groups may be new, they can **lack capacity** and **confidence**.
- Quite often, hard-to-reach groups will need **support** in terms of training and awareness-raising. **This will cost** – have you thought about where they or you can funding to support them (e.g. Community Empowerment Fund).
- Such groups may feel very **cynical** – they may feel consulted to death and nothing has changed in their life for the better.
- Sometimes the '**usual suspects**' pinch all the places (e.g. in an LSP)
- The issue is not necessarily about getting members of hard-to-reach groups onto the LSP but about the LSP **understanding what their needs are**.
- How is your LSP **using the information** obtained from 'hard to reach' groups and how are the views and needs of individual communities reflected in the policy process.
- You may experience particular difficulties in engaging with particular 'hard to reach' groups in **rural areas**. For example, the black and minority ethnic population may be relatively small in number and dispersed over a large area and your local authority may lack the necessary experience and skills to be able to engage with different communities. **Cross boundary working** with neighbouring LSPs may be useful in being able to pool resources and tap into any experience which was lacking.

Tips and hints

- **Build on what you've got** – use your existing relationships with minority sectors of the community to involve them with other local initiatives and as a route into other groups
- The voluntary and community sector consists of many, many diverse groups – **do not assume** you are consulting all the community or voluntary sector just because you have consulted, for example the local CVS (council for voluntary services). You need to have other mechanisms that reach out to a wider audience.
- **Prepare the ground** – i.e. do your groundwork, your research and community audits etc. first.
- Then water the ground – get some '**quick wins**' to counter cynicism.
- Give your relationship with hard-to-reach groups **lots of time and support** (think about mentoring, helping and supporting them through meetings, capacity building). Think about **away days** – it's very important that people can get to know each other in a more informal environment – this is important for everyone, not just the hard-to-reach.
- **Let the relationship 'flower'** – i.e. be prepared to let go, but still be 'on-hand' if required.
- **Capacity building** is also needed for **professionals** to enable them to engage with 'hard to reach' people.
- Involve communities in **monitoring strategies, policies** and initiatives, as well as understanding them and their needs.
- Think about how and what you are communicating – if people don't understand why they are on or involved with the LSP then the LSP has

failed to 'sell' itself. You should have a carefully considered **communication strategy** for the LSP that sets out procedures for feeding back information to communities. You may also think about encouraging community groups/ leaders to champion the cause of the LSP to other groups.

- When you approach community groups, **put yourself in their shoes** – what are they likely to get out of it and avoid using jargon.
- **Practical considerations** such as arranging transport, crèche facilities, expenses, timing and format of meetings may remove any barriers that prevent people from taking part.
- Think how the public sector agencies in your LSP can pool the results of any local research to **reduce duplication** and to prevent people feeling 'over consulted'.

Community Empowerment Networks and hard-to-reach groups:

Many initiatives from the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) will expect you not only to consult hard-to-reach or marginalized groups, but to fully engage them in decision-making. The NRU's Community Empowerment Fund (CEF) is investing £36 million (2001-04) in the 88 most deprived areas in England, administered locally by a community sector organisation.

The organisation will use CEF over the next year to create Networks in each area, which must include hard-to-reach groups (e.g. black and minority ethnic, youth groups and others). Much of CEF will be used for outreach and community development work for these groups. Also, CEF will be used to enable the Network to engage effectively with LSPs, and to negotiate a formal agreement with the LSP on how to involve communities.

NRU will be monitoring and supporting good practice in terms of diversity, inclusion of hard-to-reach groups, and the CEF programme will also be used as an important mechanism and means of developing good practice.

These are still early days, and the Networks are still being built. But it is vitally important that LSPs are aware of the strategic objectives of CEF and what the Networks are being set up to do. Real community involvement, especially of the most excluded groups, is a vital part of the Government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.