

finding your



Visioning Outcomes in Community Engagement



An Information Booklet on VOICE - A software tool that supports practitioners to analyse, plan, monitor and evaluate community engagement.

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1. What is VOiCE?

VOiCE is a database planning and recording tool that assists individuals, organisations and partnerships to design and deliver effective community engagement.

VOiCE can be used to support a range of participation from overall area regeneration to specific concerns of users of particular services.

VOiCE enables all users to employ a common system for analysing, planning, monitoring, evaluating and recording their community engagement.

VOiCE is published by the Scottish Government as part of its support for implementation of the National Standards for Community Engagement.

In relation to particular community engagement initiatives, VOiCE will support you to:

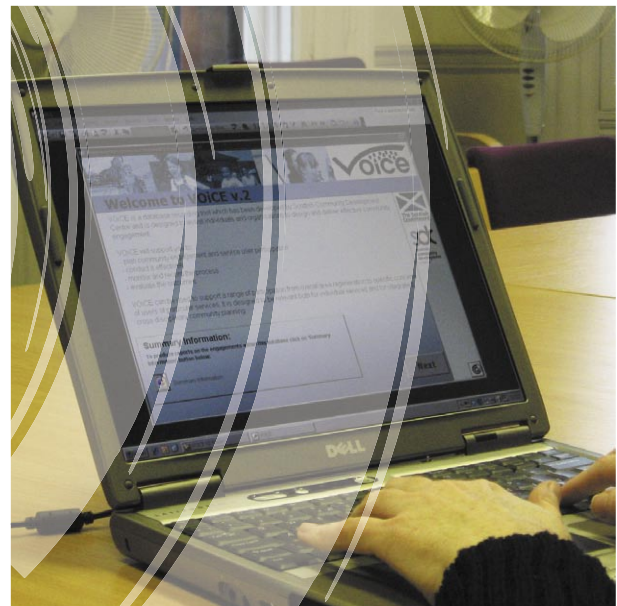
- Reflect on what you are trying to achieve
- Develop plans that relate to your purpose
- Monitor progress in implementing your plan
- Evaluate the process and outcomes
- Learn lessons for future activity

VOiCE is designed in four sections: Analyse, Plan, Do, Review. It takes you through logical steps to facilitate well constructed, managed and evaluated engagement from which you can continuously learn and improve your practice.

Across all the community engagement that your organisation or partnership is involved in VOiCE will provide a data bank that can be used to analyse:

- What engagement is being (and has been) conducted
- What issues and needs it addresses
- Where it is happening
- Who is involved in it
- Who is not involved in it that might be
- What has or has not been effective

Whilst the primary purpose of VOiCE is to support effective engagement practice, this aspect of VOiCE provides management information that can be integrated into other management information systems.



2. What are the benefits of using VOiCE?

Survey evidence from users of VOiCE has identified the following major benefits of using the tool:

- Providing a common language for community engagement
- Increased clarity of purpose for community engagement
- Enabling shared planning of community engagement with colleagues/partners and communities
- Enabling shared conduct of community engagement with colleagues/partners and communities
- Enabling shared evaluation of community engagement with colleagues/partners and communities
- Improved quality of community engagement processes and methods
- Improved quality of community engagement outcomes
- Improved capacity to report on community engagement
- Consistency of approach to community engagement by colleagues/partners
- Improved capacity to co-ordinate and manage community engagement
- Storing and retrieving information about community engagement initiatives
- Enabling practical application of the National Standards for Community Engagement
- Increasing the efficiency of community engagement.

3. How can you get hold of VOiCE?

VOiCE can be downloaded from the web site of the Scottish Community Development Centre for use on your own computer or a server shared with colleagues or partners:
www.scdc.org.uk/voice/download/

During 2010 it will become possible for agencies and partnerships to have dedicated, secure space on an independent VOiCE web site that will host data records from the VOiCE tool. Details will be advertised on the Scottish Government and SCDC web sites.
www.scdc.org.uk



4. How does VOiCE work?

When you are involved in a particular piece of community engagement, VOiCE invites you to address questions under the headings: analyse, plan, do and review as they become relevant to the engagement you are conducting. It asks you to record relevant information relating to these questions on a computer. These recordings build up throughout the process of the engagement. They enable you, with other participants, to reflect on what you are doing and whether it is enabling you to achieve your purposes.

Throughout the engagement VOiCE provides you with access to:

- Handy hints that are relevant to the particular stage of an engagement process
- The relevant National Standard for Community Engagement
- Worked examples of how the database can be used for different types of community engagement

It will also enable you to:

- create and print reports
- attach links to other documents
- identify and consult records of other engagements held on the data base

VOiCE assists you to identify the appropriate level of engagement for your purposes. It focuses on clarity about whether you are:

- simply providing information to communities,
- consulting people in relation to specified options or
- entering into a more open relationship which may involve shared decision making or action

If you are managing or co-ordinating community engagement across an agency or partnership you will have access to the recording of all the engagement activities that are being conducted. You can analyse the records to identify what is happening or look at the detail of particular engagements. You can;

- identify themes and issues,
- plot geographical coverage,
- differentiate between levels of community involvement being adopted (i.e. information provision, consultation, or engagement involving joint decision making or action),
- avoid duplication,
- promote networking and mutual learning between initiatives,
- evaluate overall effectiveness,
- report on what is being done,
- assess and guide the contribution of engagement to strategic purposes.



5. What are the key steps in VOiCE and what is required at each stage?

We have explained that VOiCE is organised in four sections: Analyse, Plan, Do, Review. We have also explained that in each section there is a series of key questions to answer and that there is a set of prompts or 'key question' that provide handy hints to help you think about what needs to be considered at each stage. In this section we have simply listed some of the key questions relating to each stage. In a separate booklet, which can be used to guide the process of engagement, we have set the handy hints alongside these key steps and questions.

Analyse

1. Our reason for engagement is....?
2. Which is the right level of involvement for our purposes?
3. Before we plan the engagement:
 - What do we know?
 - What do we need to know?
4. Who has an interest in our focus of engagement?
5. Who needs encouragement?
6. Are there any conflicts of interest that might emerge?
7. What is the engagement theme or locality?

Plan

1. What outcomes are stakeholders looking for?
2. What will success look like?
3. What barriers might affect anyone who should be involved?
4. What resources might be needed to overcome these barriers?
5. Is there a need for independent community development support or specialist advice and, if so, where would it come from?

6. What resources are available to us: skills, experience, budgets, facilities, time etc?
7. What methods will we use?
8. What actions will be taken?

Do

1. Are we doing what we said we would do when we said we would do it?
2. Are we getting the stakeholders involved and contributing appropriately?
3. Are we all working well together?
4. Are we keeping everyone informed?
5. What are we learning?
6. Do we need to revise our analysis, methods or action plan?

Review

1. How have stakeholders been involved in collecting evidence and judging performance?
2. How well did we meet the National Standards for Community Engagement?
3. Reviewing the outcomes from your plan, how successful have you been?
4. How many community stakeholders did the engagement process reach?
5. Did all agency stakeholders identified in Analyse and Plan continue to be involved throughout the engagement process?
6. Have there been any unanticipated outcomes?
7. Was the engagement pitched at the right level?
8. What key lessons have been learned as a result of the engagement?

6. Why use VOiCE?

Users of VOiCE have identified a wide range of applications and benefits from adopting the tool. VOiCE has been found to be easy and efficient to use. Whilst providing a very thorough approach to engagement of communities it has also been found to provide a common language for describing community engagement and to offer a straightforward way of understanding the requirements of best practice. In turn these characteristics have enabled better co-ordination and consistency.

It was designed, and is primarily used, to analyse, plan, conduct and evaluate engagement. Users report positively on each of these aspects of the tool and on the logical process involved in working through each stage. VOiCE has also been applied retrospectively to review work that is already completed. In the light of experience it has been possible to highlight strengths and weaknesses of practice and learn lessons for future activity.

VOiCE has been found to be a robust tool for the practice of engagement not only by individuals but also for teams, intra and inter-agency partnerships. It has allowed those conducting the engagement to produce clear and accurate records in a focused and efficient manner and in turn enabled efficient and informed production of clear evidence based evaluative reports.

VOiCE places emphasis on clarity of purpose through the setting of clear and measurable outcomes. It has therefore enabled an approach to engagement that can be integrated into wider outcome based vision and planning statements such as the Single Outcome Agreements between Councils and their community planning partners.

Overall users feel that VOiCE has enabled them to work more effectively towards the achievement of the National Standards for Community Engagement and reported that the software has supported their teams to more effectively manage and coordinate engagements.

7. What helps you get started with using VOiCE?

Experience of introducing VOiCE in a wide range of setting has suggested some approaches that may be useful to help users get started.

1. Raising awareness of VOiCE and what it can do

- a. Capturing motivation –
 - i. Introduce it to people who need to conduct engagement.
 - ii. Introduce it when they need to know.
 - iii. Explain its capacity to make community engagement more efficient and effective.

- b. Demonstrating its value –
 - i. Use examples of the products of its use e.g. VOiCE based reports.
 - ii. Provide local case studies/examples.
 - iii. Publicise examples from similar settings and circumstances.
 - iv. Involve communities who have used or been involved in VOiCE.

- c. Targeting -
 - i. Identify key policy makers and influencers – politicians, officers, community leaders.
 - ii. Run events and make presentations.
 - iii. Identify resources to explain VOiCE.
 - iv. Think about the best approach.

2. Developing individual understanding and skills for using VOiCE

- a. Options for learning:
 - i. training events.
 - ii. mentoring.
 - iii. peer learning.

- b. Approaches to learning:
 - i. Importance of applied and experiential approach.
 - ii. Importance of hands on computer based learning.
 - iii. Running hands-on training events.

- c. What do people need to learn?
 - i. Principles of a logic model approach to planning and evaluation of engagement.
 - ii. Understanding the key steps: Analyse - Plan - Do - Review.
 - iii. Understanding the scope of the key VOiCE questions.
 - iv. Understanding what the VOiCE resource contains and how to navigate through it.
 - v. Linking VOiCE to the National Standards for Community Engagement.
 - vi. Turning records into useable reports.
 - vii. Using VOiCE with communities.

3. Developing skills for teams, organisations and partnerships

- a. Understanding the need for and value co-ordinated and integrated approaches to community engagement:
 - i. Consequences of uncoordinated approaches.
 - ii. Benefits of pooled knowledge and resources.

- b. Understanding the power of the data base tool:
 - i. Sharing, analysing and learning from records.
 - ii. Sustaining a strategic approach.
 - iii. Aggregating and feeding back performance information.

- c. Identifying and enabling the custodians of VOiCE:
 - i. Identifying who will hold and use the records.
 - ii. Being clear about what they can be used for.
 - iii. Identifying what restriction might be necessary.

4. Setting up the technical requirements

- a. Be clear with potential users and IT providers that VOICE will:
 - i. Run on any computer with appropriate Microsoft Access or Runtime software.
 - ii. Only be able to be used at team or agency levels if it is located on a suitable shared drive or commonly accessible server. (NB It will be likely to be most accessible if used in its on-line form).



8. Where did VOiCE come from?

VOiCE was commissioned to support more effective community engagement and empowerment policy. The time-line diagram on page 18 sets out key developments to which VOiCE relates. Towards the end of the Scottish Social Inclusion Partnership regeneration programme criticism was voiced of the quality of much community engagement practice. The criticisms were consistent with wider research evidence. Burton¹ summarises the evidence in the following way:

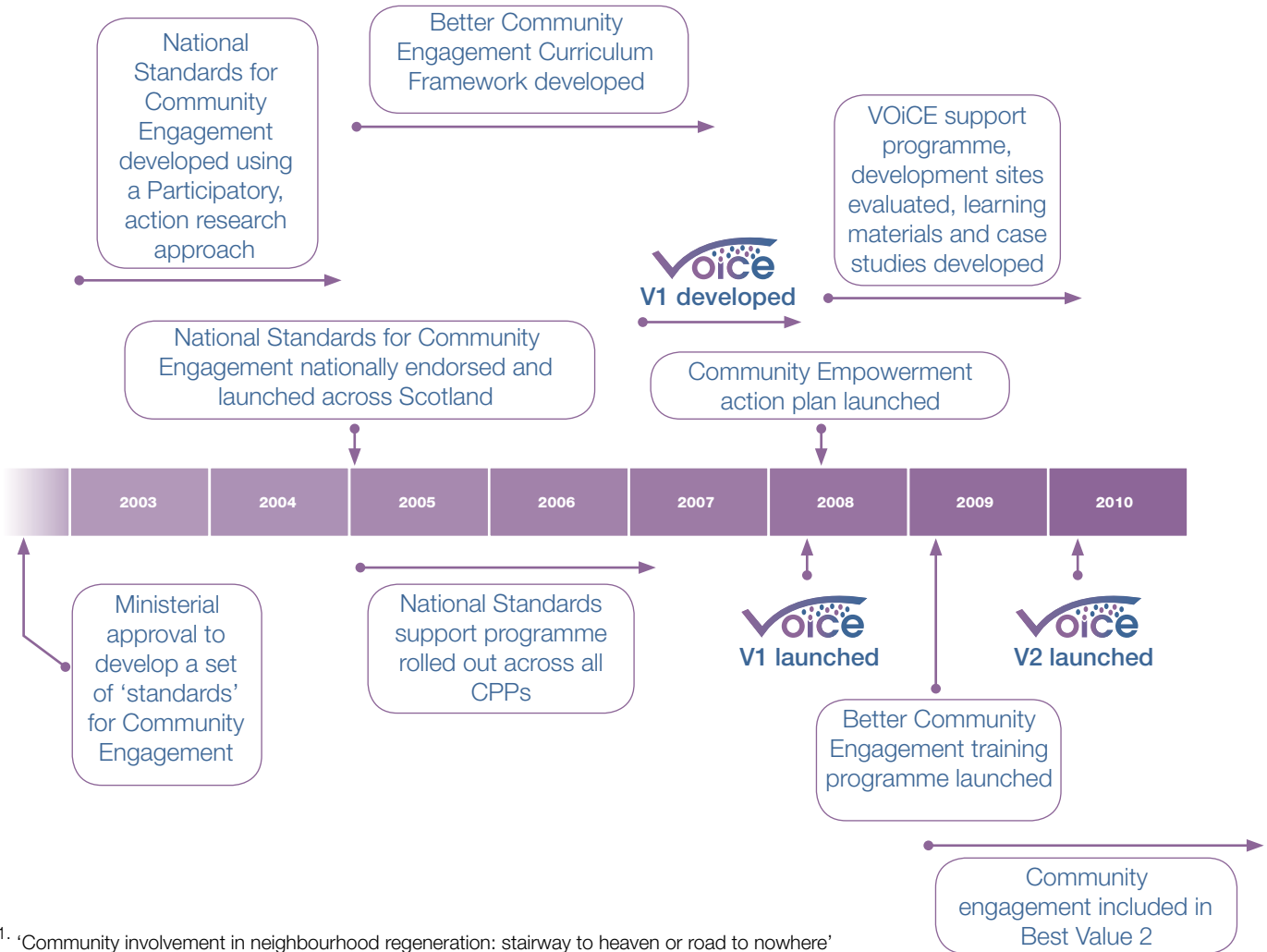
‘The conclusion of many studies is that public involvement did not work very well in practice: it was embarked upon too late; insufficient resources were provided to make it effective; the local environment was not very conducive; and key decisions continued to be taken by people not living in the areas affected’.

Such evidence was discussed in a Scottish Social Inclusion Network working group set up by the Scottish Minister for Communities and led to recommendations to establish standards for community engagement to provide ground rules for best practice. Following an extensive two year engagement process National Standards for Community Engagement² were identified from community experience, published and endorsed by the government, local government, the NHS, police and many others. This was followed by a further two year programme to publicise and embed the standards in practice. Whilst almost universally adopted by councils and other public agencies, it was apparent that putting the standards into practice was a significant challenge. The government had already commissioned development of a competences framework for best practice in community engagement³ and in 2007 it commissioned VOiCE.

VOiCE was developed with extensive involvement of practitioners and launched in 2008 with funding for a two year demonstration programme that has resulted in revision and improvement to the tool. It is seen as contributing to delivering the government’s Community Empowerment Action Plan and supporting public agencies to meet the requirements of a new Audit Scotland Best Value framework. More broadly, VOiCE can be seen in the context of the 2008 concordat agreement established between central and local government that empowers the latter, with its community planning partners, to develop a Single Outcome Agreement that relates local priorities to the National Performance Framework and do so in a manner that engages communities.

The need to engage with communities becomes more and more embedded in national policy guidance across a range of themes

Agencies increasingly required to become accountable to communities and service users



1. 'Community involvement in neighbourhood regeneration: stairway to heaven or road to nowhere' Paul Burton Centre for Neighbourhood Research, Bristol University 13 July 2003

2. National Standards for Community Engagement , Scottish Executive 2005

3. Better Community Engagement Framework (Learning Connections, Communities. Scotland, 2007)

9. VOiCE and Methods of Community Engagement

In the Plan section of VOiCE users are invited to identify the methods of community engagement that they will adopt for their particular purposes. As VOiCE itself does not provide specific guidance on what methods can be used for what purpose we recommend that other sources of information are used.

Within the Plan section there is a web link to the Scottish Government's website which highlights engagement techniques. This is a very useful resource to help you identify and access information about methods of engagement. It is however only one of many useful resources. Other links that may be very helpful include the web sites of Involve: www.peopleandparticipation.net and the web site of the National Practitioner Panel for Community Engagement in Policing: www.communityengagementinpolicing.net.

Whilst VOiCE does not prescribe particular methods it focuses in on meeting the commitment of the National Standards for Community Engagement to 'agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose'. Answering the analytical questions in VOiCE provides guidance towards selecting appropriate methods. It ensures clarity about:

- The level of engagement proposed (i.e. whether it is informing, consulting, or engaging in shared decision making or action).
- Who we are trying to engage.
- What barriers to involvement they may experience.
- What the purposes of engagement are and the outcomes to be delivered.
- What the timescales can be.
- What resources are available to support the engagement.

Clarity in these areas enables appropriate selection of methods. Appendix 1 provides a listing of some of the types of methods that can be used at each level of engagement

10. VOiCE and the National Standards for Community Engagement

VOiCE was developed to support the implementation of the National Standards for Community Engagement. This is why throughout the tool you will find that the Standards will be highlighted that are relevant to the particular stage of community engagement you are working on.

So what are the National Standards?

The National Standards for Community Engagement set out best practice guidance for engagement between communities and public agencies. The standards were:

- Commissioned by the Minister for Communities.
- Developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre from the experience of communities and agencies with extensive participation of over 500 community and agency representatives.
- Published in 2005 with endorsement by the Scottish Executive, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, NHS Health Scotland, the Association of Chief Police Officers and many others.
- Recommended by Audit Scotland.

The National Standards for Community Engagement are a good practice tool:

- Developed through community and agency engagement.
- Tested in practice.
- Setting out mutual commitments between agencies and communities.
- Promoting equality.
- Celebrating diversity.
- Building skills and confidence.
- Providing indicators of best quality performance.
- Driving continuous improvement.
- Embedded at the heart of what government promotes in Scotland.

The National Standards are set out in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The National Standard for Community Engagement

The Involvement Standard

We will identify and involve the people and organisations with an interest in the focus of the engagement.

The Support Standard

We will identify and overcome any barriers to involvement.

The Planning Standard

We will gather evidence of the needs and available resources and use this to agree the purpose, scope and timescale of the engagement and the actions to be taken.

The Methods Standard

We will agree and use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

The Working Together Standard

We will agree and use clear procedures to enable the participants to work with one another efficiently and effectively.

The Sharing Information Standard

We will ensure necessary information is communicated between the participants.

The Working With Others Standard

We will work effectively with others with an interest in the engagement.

The Improvement Standard

We will develop actively the skills, knowledge and confidence of all the participants.

The Feedback Standard

We will feedback the results of the engagement to the wider community and agencies affected.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Standard

We will monitor and evaluate whether the engagement meets its purposes and the national

standards for community engagement.

Note: If you are reading this on a computer with an internet connection, by clicking on the title of each standard you can reach the indicators for each standard. If not you will need to use a computer and look at the standards at the following address:

www.scdc.org.uk/national-standards-community-engagement/10-national-standards/

When you are using VOiCE these standards should guide the way in which you think about, plan and conduct your community engagement. But most significantly the review section of VOiCE will require you, along with everyone else who has had an active involvement, to judge the competence of your own performance against the National Standards.



11. VOiCE and capacity building policies and programmes

VOiCE is a powerful tool to support effective community engagement. But it is only a tool. Good community engagement requires people in both agencies and communities with skills to engage. As the Improvement Standard within the National Standards for Community Engagement makes clear, the capacity of agencies and communities needs to be built. There is therefore a strong link between VOiCE and other initiatives that seek to build the strengths of:

- Agencies and organisations (including community led organisations) that engage communities
- Communities that are engaged.

This view is reflected in the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Action Plan which notes that though community empowerment is a much broader process:

'.....there was a strong view that many communities simply wanted better opportunities to be heard by public sector bodies when they are planning and delivering services.'

It is important therefore to make the connections between VOiCE and policies and programmes that seek to strengthen the skills and competence for community engagement of both agencies and communities.

In 2004 the government published guidance on community learning and development entitled: 'Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities'. This identified building community capacity as one of three national priorities and described the task in the following terms:

'... enabling people to develop the confidence, understanding and skills required to influence decision making and service delivery'.

Capacity to influence decisions is not just affected by the ability of communities but equally by the quality of the opportunities for engagement that agencies provide. VOiCE is therefore a tool that enhances the ability of communities by improving the environment in which they seek influence.

To assist agencies the Scottish Government published a Better Community Engagement Curriculum framework in 2007. The framework identifies the core competences required for good community engagement (set out in figure 2 opposite) and informs learning initiatives designed to establish and enhance these competences.

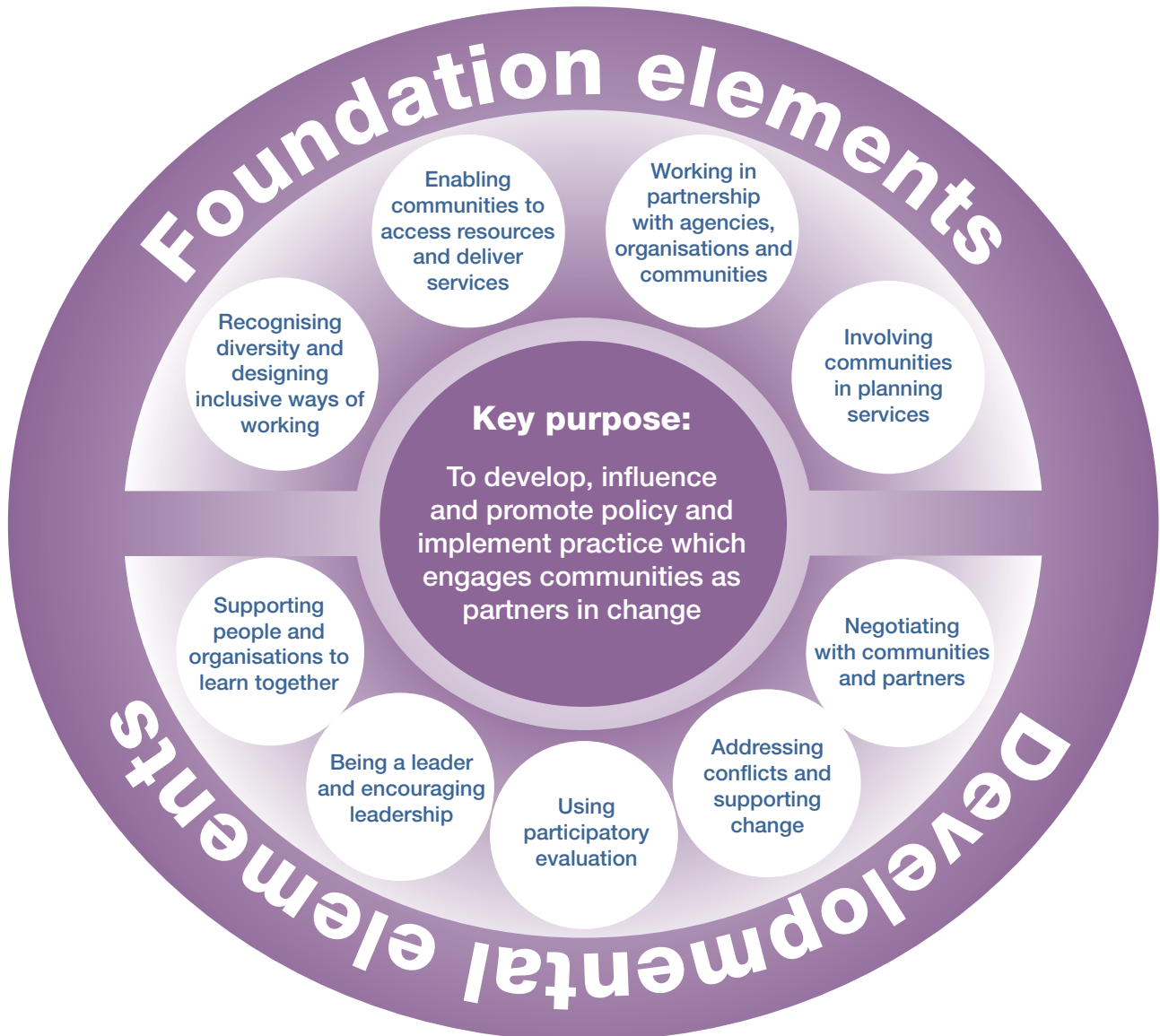
To assist communities the Scottish Government has set out its approach to community empowerment in its action plan. This defines community empowerment as follows:

‘Community empowerment is a process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them.’

This definition indicates that community empowerment is about people taking action for change themselves as well as about being in a position where they can have more influence over what others, particularly public agencies, do in their communities. To achieve this influence they need good engagement skills. This can come through community learning and development support work delivered by statutory, voluntary and community agencies. Guidance from Scottish Government on the community learning and development capacity building role can be found in *Working and Learning Together to Build Stronger Communities* (2004)

Whilst VOiCE may be a potentially powerful tool it is at its best when all the participants involved in its use are skilled to engage effectively with one another. Capacity building for agencies and communities is often a key step to employing VOiCE effectively for community engagement

Figure 2: Key Purpose and Elements of the Better Community Engagement Framework



12. Where can you find out more about VOiCE?

VOiCE was developed on behalf of Scottish Government by the Scottish Community Development Centre. The Centre has a team of staff with extensive experience in supporting people and organisations to use VOiCE. It also has a dedicated section of its web site devoted to VOiCE: www.scdc.org.uk/voice/

If you want further information or support to use VOiCE please contact:

The Scottish Community Development
305 Baltic Chambers
50 Wellington St
Glasgow G2 6HJ
Tel: 01412481924
info@scdc.org.uk
www.scdc.org.uk



Appendix 1

Some potential methods appropriate for different levels of engagement

Informing

- Advertising in local media – newspapers, local radio
- Advertising in community run media - community newspapers/newsletters, parish magazines, community web sites, community radio etc
- Posters/billboards
- Web and podcasting
- Text messaging
- Mail shots
- Email shots
- Local notice boards – shops/supermarkets, churches, mosques, libraries, clinics etc
- Exhibitions in public spaces (models, pictures, maps etc)

Consulting

a) Individual focus

- Questionnaires
 - self completion
 - administered
- Opinion polls
- Interviews
 - non-directive
 - semi-structured
- Suggestion boxes
- Interactive displays/exhibitions
- On-line consultations

b) Group/community focus

- Buzz groups
- Speed dating
- Group interviews/focus groups
- Nominal group process
- Group passing process
- Area forums
- Citizens panels
- Citizens juries
- Open meetings/events including:
 - i. 'Open space'
 - ii. 'World café'
 - iii. 'PP vote/Option Finder'

Engaging in shared decision making or action

- Open meetings/events including:
 - I. 'Open house',
 - II. Open space
 - III. 'World café',
 - IV. 'PP vote/Option Finder' etc
- Stakeholder workshops
- Story dialogue
- Photovoice
- Deliberative mapping
- Planning for Real
- Design charrettes
- Participatory drama/forum theatre

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