

Project Overview

In January 2020, Community Places was awarded funding to deliver the Putting People in the Lead through Quality PB project. The project was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and set in the broader context of its Great Ideas Programme. The aim was to achieve a ‘quality’ locally led and tailored approach to the planning and application of PB processes through the development of a PB Charter. This means that every PB process should place an emphasis on planning for participation and that community stakeholders should be involved from the outset genuinely putting people in the lead.



Project Outputs and Activities

PB Charter – Co-designed with PB practitioners, the community and voluntary sector, statutory, government departments and local councils the PB Charter places a strong emphasis on supporting high quality PB processes and practice. It has also been designed to reflect on the learning experiences from the delivery of PB activity across the region.



PB Route Map – Developed during the project outlining five key asks to show how and why PB should be mainstreamed and the benefits it can deliver for communities. These include a core programme of support, increasing cross-party PB support for 1% allocation of public expenditure via PB, and establishment of a regional PB steering group led by DfC and DoF.



Four PB Learning Workshops – Explored Participatory Budgeting further in the context of community wealth building, digital applications, community-led working and the COVID recovery with an aggregated total of 180 attendees working across different sectors.



Lobbying – Increased engagement with all NI political parties as well as statutory departments, including the Department for Communities and Minister Deirdre Hargey. It has also facilitated input into recent consultations on the Rural Development Programme, PEACE PLUS and the Programme for Government and made linkages to the civic engagement approaches outlined in the New Decade New Approach document.



Information Sessions and Support – Delivery of five online and in-room information sessions to help support PB projects directly at the point of need and to build the capacity of PB practitioners, especially those working across the local community and voluntary sector.



Supporting Quality PB

During the spring and summer 2022 the project co-designed its very own PB Charter. It has been developed to ensure that local communities are at the heart of every PB process, to provide clarity on what quality PB looks like in practice as well as to offer additional support for the planning and design of PB processes. The Charter is aimed at anyone who is involved in designing, supporting or taking part in a PB process, however, additional pilot work will be required by practitioners to help future proof the Charter and further support mainstreaming processes across the region.



“Ultimately the co-production of a local charter will set the standards for what is expected from PB practice across the region and the focus on practical support and use of local learning examples is critical to help grow and mainstream PB in the long term”

Project Outcomes and Impacts

Provision of Timely and Relevant Support - The timing of this support to community-based projects was critical, especially during the pandemic and the pressing need to adopt remote digital working practices. The assistance also highlighted the importance of brokering relationships with the right partners, establishing working groups but also understanding timeframes and what resources are necessary to facilitate high quality PB processes. The region-wide focus of this approach worked well and increased the capacity and confidence levels of the PB practitioners who have since further developed their own skillsets by availing of additional support online via the PB works website.

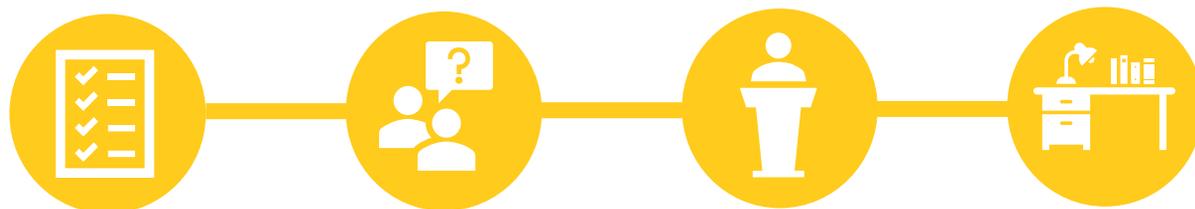
Showcasing PB and its Potential - This project has been successful in articulating what PB is and highlighting its clear potential for setting budgetary priorities and allocating public expenditure. Such awareness raising has brokered spin-off involvement from the Department for Communities which has been directly involved with local activity by match funding PB initiatives organised through local councils.

The Value of an Advocacy Partner - Lobbying work during the project was very targeted through the PB route map and yielded positive discussions with public officials working at the various government levels, specifically the Department for Communities and Minister Deirdre Hargey as well as The Executive Office. Consulted public officials remain positive around the benefits of PB but are still fundamentally constrained by a weak regulatory environment which highlights the clear institutional barriers facing PB here in comparison to other places like Scotland.

Catalysing Local PB Working and Partnerships - Despite institutional barriers, this project has helped to establish effective local connections across community-led PB projects but also across housing associations, health trusts, PCSP's, and local councils. The workshops and information sessions proved to be a highly effective tool for sharing PB learning practice but for also creating a platform that has enabled attendees to network and better understand how PB processes could be connected to emerging policy frameworks as well as their existing programmes of work.

Growing the PB Community - Both the development of the route map and the PB Charter has helped to reinvigorate the support around PB processes across the region. It has been extremely timely and positive that new actors (from both the community and voluntary sector and local government officials) have inputted and citizens themselves now have more opportunities to lead on or participate more regularly in local PB processes.

Moving Forward with Participatory Budgeting



Policy + Programmes

- A range of examples including local council capital grant schemes, PCSPs, the work of Housing Associations and local Health Trusts.
- Clear linkages with Anti-Poverty Strategies (e.g., NRA), the Community Wealth Building agenda and the Rural Development Programme but must have resources attached to be impactful at the point of need.
- Innovative applications across PEACE PLUS.

Capacity Building + Support

- Technical financial guidance from Audit Office NI to guide budget administrators and finance personnel.
- Securing effective resourcing of inputs to support PB activity and associated delivery costs.
- Growing existing and new local PB delivery networks made up of cross-sectoral representation.
- Developing further strategic and operational guidance drawing on local learning experiences through the PB Charter.

Lobbying + Development

- Lobbying to strengthen the wider regulatory environment for PB.
- Advancing the five asks set out in the PB route map to help mainstream PB as a tool for setting budgetary priorities and allocating resources at all government levels.
- Strengthening cross-party political support for the advancement of PB.
- Enhancing the level of technical support for PB practitioners working in the CV sector but also for public sector officials.

Research + Analysis

- Continue to build and share the evidence base of local PB practice across the region through showcasing events.
- Identify new policy or programme areas to embed PB, potentially in the local youth sector or even as a citizen political education tool.
- Explore new ways of showcasing the blended value created by PB processes and their impacts on communities to enhance its value proposition.