Active Retirement Ireland:

Toolkit for Participation in Local Decision-Making
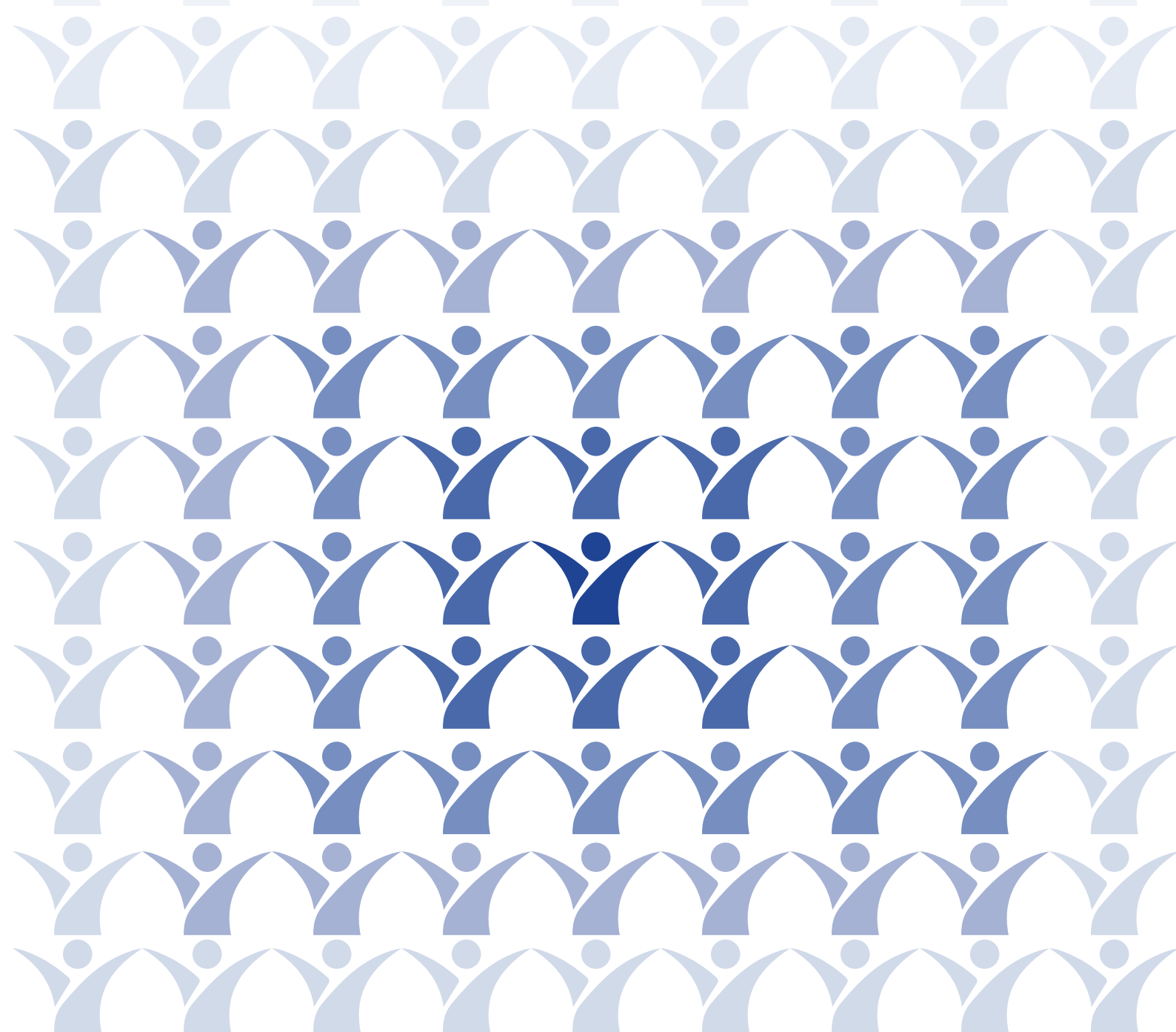
ACTIVE RETIREMENT IRELAND

PART 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Based on the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process (from the Council of Europe Conference of INGOs)

Contents

Acknowledgements

Some Definitions

ARA: Local Active Retirement Association

ARI: Active Retirement Ireland

the Code: the Code of Good Practice for Civil participation in the Decision-Making Process, from the Council of Europe, INGO forum, 2009

OPCs: Older people's Councils (sometimes also called Older People's Fora)

PPNs: Public Participation Networks

NGOs: non-governmental organisations

Public authorities:

This term is used in the Code to mean governments, parliaments and local, regional and national administration. Because this toolkit focuses on involvement in local decision-making, when used here, we mainly mean to refer to **local authorities**.

1.Introduction

In 2018, Active Retirement Ireland (ARI) conducted surveys of the members of Active Retirement Associations (ARAs) and published research on how they engaged in decision-making structures at county level. The research looked specifically at how they described and felt about their involvement in Local Authority Older People's Councils (OPCs) and Public Participation Networks (PPNs). (**See Appendix 1** for an introduction to OPCs and PPNs).

The research found that ARA members are involved in local decision-making structures (OPCs and PPNs). They often value their participation and were often satisfied with their involvement. It also showed that they described their involvement as largely attending meetings and receiving information and to a lesser extent being consulted on plans and developments. Within both OPCs and PPNs, they experienced two-way communication or being able to influence decisions much less often. Few characterised their involvement as working in cooperation or partnership.

When we compared their responses with a European code that encourages engagement by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in decision-making (the Code of Good Practice for Civil participation in the Decision-Making Process, see below), we found that their involvement remained at what the Code characterises as the lower or less intense levels of engagement.

As the report acknowledged, this was not altogether surprising given how centralised government is in Ireland and how decision-making is traditionally made at the top. Therefore, to be genuinely participative, the structures of OPCs and PPNs need to challenge traditional, top-down ways of working. This represents a new approach for all involved – both central and local government staff and public officials and also for members of NGOs such as ARI.

Approaches that aim to include ordinary people and their organisations in decision-making in an ongoing way have a range of consequences. They affect how money is spent, and they require a genuine commitment at both central and local government to develop different, more inclusive and participatory, ways of working. A key conclusion of the research was that there is still much more potential within these structures (OPCs and PPNs) to work in partnership and in ways in which developments can be co-created with community NGOs. This toolkit has been developed to respond in a practical way to those findings. It aims to make a contribution to these processes.

This is **Part 1** of two documents intended to be used together to help local ARAs to interact with local authorities. Its aim is to help them to use principles that promote human rights across Europe and that are intended to improve decision-making, and to guide how NGOs may engage in decision-making. Therefore, it is based on the principles of the European Code of Good Practice for Civil participation in the Decision-Making Process. In this **Part 1** we set out some background on civic engagement, introduce the Code, suggest some issues that ARA members might consider in using it and include some examples of ways in which they currently engage. It also sets out the duties of public authorities as the Code describes them.

Part 2 is a practical workbook which is intended to help ARA members to consider their involvement in decisions using the steps in the policy-making process that the Code outlines. It is intended as a series of prompts, a starting point that might evolve and be developed by those who use it over time. It may lead to the development of further guidance that will be developed with ARA members.

Background

Civic Engagement: Benefits for Individuals

Research shows that older people greatly benefit from getting involved in their communities. People have been shown to benefit from different kinds of engagement. These include volunteering, involvement with younger people (such as mentoring and education), and becoming active in social, political and community causes . Benefits for individuals include improved well-being (physically, emotionally and mentally), higher levels of life satisfaction, and even longer life.

Governments and other public bodies now often focus on encouraging older people to get involved in their communities. Part of the reason they do so is to harness time, skills and expertise to improve communities and also because engagement in social and productive activities (such as volunteering and learning) benefits people's health and wellbeing .

Policies and Approaches

Public policy approaches at international and national level stress citizen engagement or related concepts. These approaches include 'active ageing' - widely promoted by international policy-making bodies such as the World Health Organization. It is linked to promoting healthy ageing and it defines active ageing as a process of:

> *'optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age' (World Health Organization 2002).'*

There is a growing interest in concepts such as 'deliberative democracy' – approaches that understand that democracies work better when people engage in discussion in which they may be challenged, may learn from others, and may ultimately be better able to contribute to political decisions. These approaches require a focus on civil society and civic engagement as a way to encourage and nurture debate . There are different views about what civic engagement is, as it can be used to mean different things. One approach views it as community involvement or volunteering. Another includes political participation and activism.

Policies and Approaches – Ireland

For Irish people local government is often their first experience of democratic institutions and systems. Therefore, county and city councils are important for the political engagement and education of both citizens and public representatives. However, government in Ireland is quite centralised. In fact, the relationship between central government and local government can be described as principal and agent rather than partnership .

In Ireland, one criticism is that concepts of active citizenship and civic engagement have been used to mean volunteering and helping out in local communities rather than encouraging people to analyse and question the root causes of many 'deficits in infrastructure and services' .

Citizen engagement has been a key component of the Irish government's approach to reform of local government (see *Putting People First, the action programme for the reform of local government*). This was also part of the development of the national Age Friendly Cities and Counties (AFCC) programme which aims to get people involved through OPCs. This approach also informed the development of PPNs. In 2016, government published an *Open Government Partnership National Action Plan*. Its first aim is to increase citizen engagement and to improve policies and services.

Contents of Toolkit, Parts 1 and 2

The intention of this Toolkit is to enable ARI members to use the Code of Good Practice for Civil participation in the Decision-Making Process ('the Code') to have an effective dialogue with local authorities (and also potentially with national ones).

Part 1:

- Summarises the main features of the Code addressing levels of participation and stages in the decision-making process;

- Suggests some questions that ARA members might ask and actions they might take as they engage with OPCs and PPNs;

- Includes some examples of how ARI members already engage;

- Outlines what the Code describes as the responsibilities of public authorities,

Part 2 – Workbook

This provides a series of prompts to enable ARA members who are already engaging in local decision-making processes to analyse their involvement in light of the Code's principles and to consider how they might seek to shape that engagement in the future.

# 2. Introducing the Code of Good Practice

The Code

The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making process comes from Europe's leading human rights organisation, the Council of Europe. Members of this Council come from 47 countries (including 28 European Union countries). The Code recognises that democracy needs people to participate in decisions. Participating in decisions helps defend human rights. Specifically, the Code is designed to encourage involvement by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the political decision-making process (whether at local, regional or and national level). The Code was based on experience of NGOs across Europe.

It contains a set of general principles and guidelines for civil participation in the political decision-making process. It is addressed both to public bodies (like local authorities and national governments) and to NGOs. Complying with the Code is intended to benefit individuals, communities, societies and governments.

The Code is informed by principles of participation, trust, accountability and transparency and independence (see **Appendix 2**).

Levels of Participation

There are two key aspects to the Code. It first outlines different kinds (or levels) of participation that NGOs may engage in. These range from simple provision of information to consultation, dialogue and finally partnership between NGOs and public authorities. These levels go from a low level of intensity of engagement (information) to progressively higher levels of intensity of engagement (ultimately working in partnership). **See diagram below**.

INFORMATION   CONSULTATION   DIALOGUE   PARTNERSHIP

-BROAD
-COLLABORATIVE

LOW   LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION   HIGH
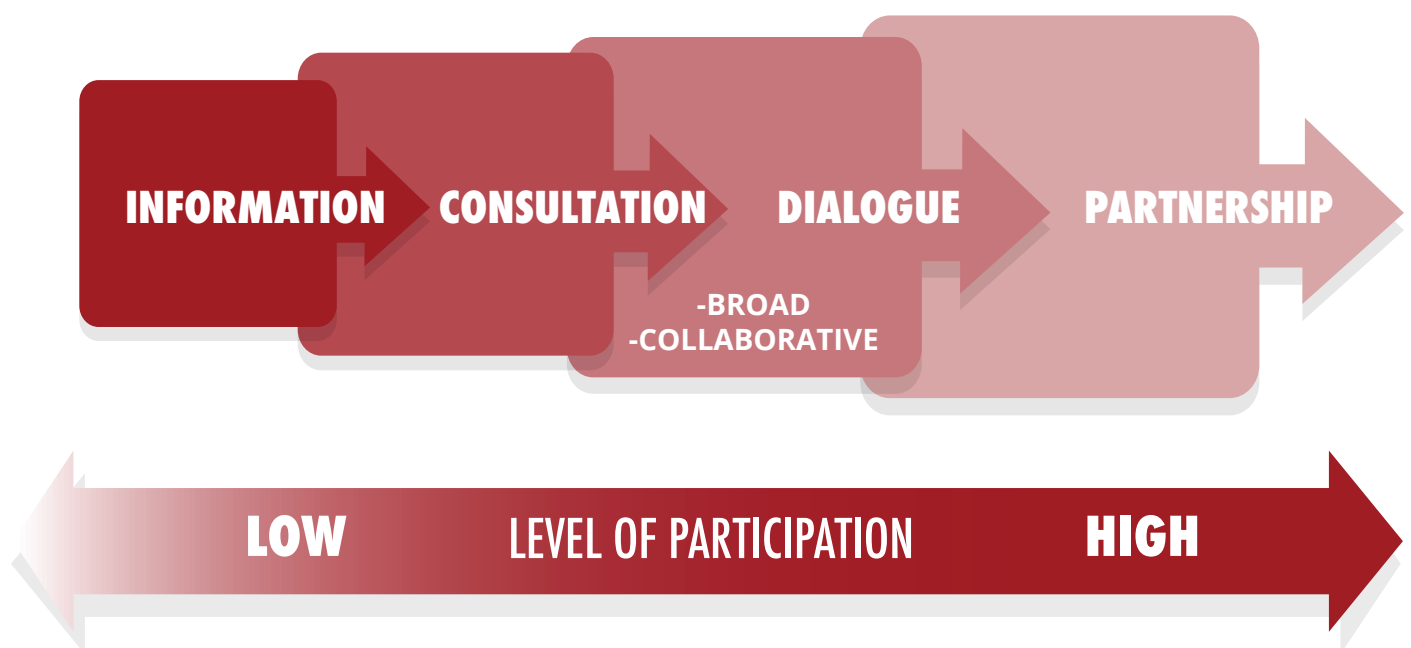
Steps in Decision-making

Secondly, in order to assist NGOs to engage in decision-making processes, the Code also sets out six steps in the policy-making process. These are steps taken by public authorities (like local authorities) when they plan changes or improvements to how policies or services are planned and implemented. They range from agenda-setting through implementation to monitoring and reformulation of policies. At each step, NGOs and public bodies may interact – so at all stages in the process there should be opportunities for NGOs to be involved and to influence.

The steps are: agenda-setting, drafting of policy, decision-making, implementation of policy, monitoring and reformulation of policy. **See below.**

MONITORING

REFORMULATION

IMPLEMENTATION

DECISION

STEPS IN DECISION-MAKING

AGENDA SETTING

DRAFTING
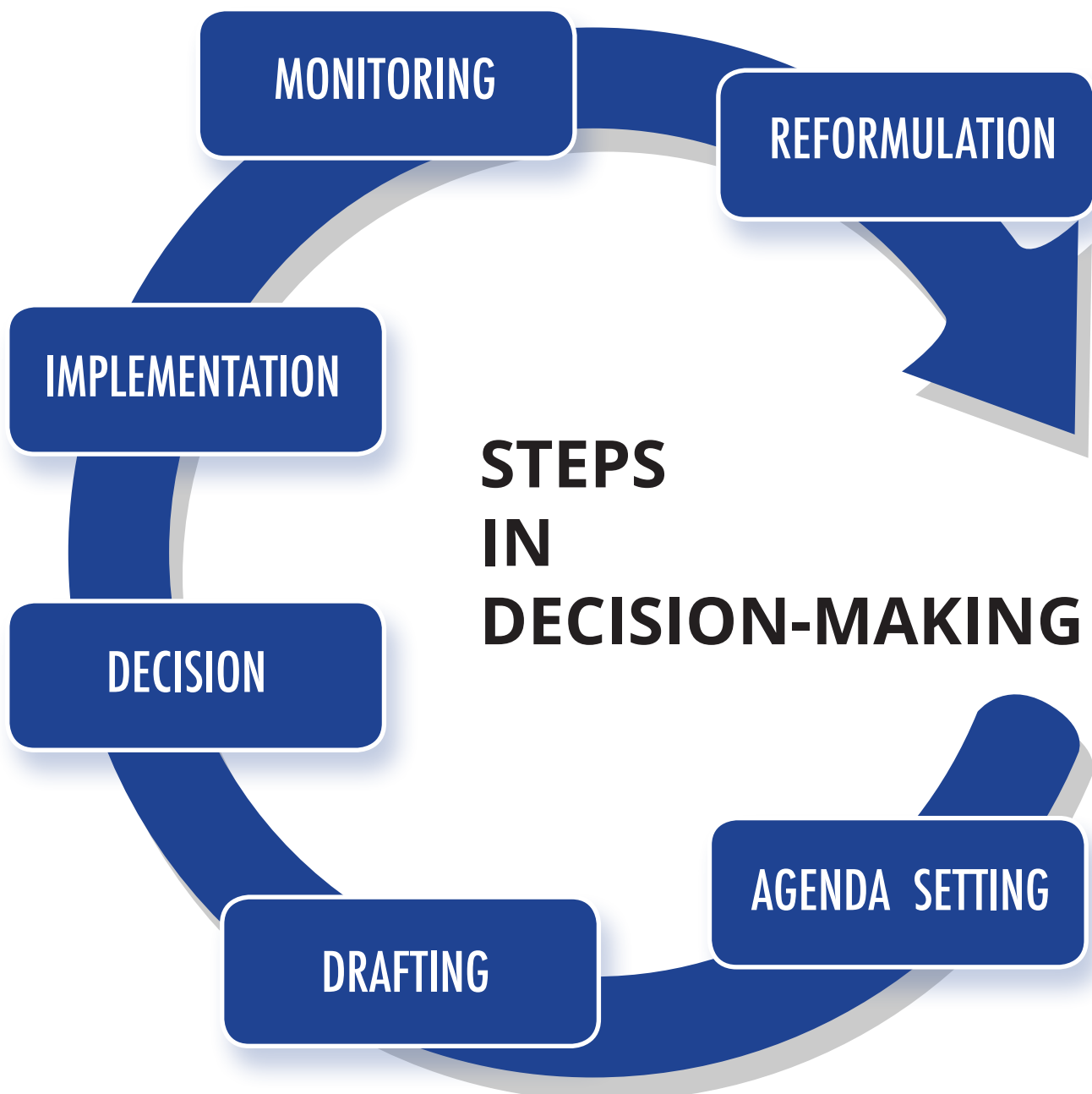
3. Active Retirement Ireland Members – Applying the Levels of Participation in the Code

INFORMATION

Levels of Participation: Checklist for ARI members

Step 1: Information:

Access to information is the basis for all subsequent steps in the involvement of NGOs in decision-making. Information is, therefore, highly important.

However, on its own, it remains a relatively low level of participation and can consist of one-way provision of information with no interaction or involvement with NGOs. Information is also relevant for all steps in the decision-making process – because without it ARI members cannot participate in decision-making.

ARI members and Information
ARI members attend meetings and receive information about local decision-making through their involvement with the OPCs and PPNs. Many believe that as a result they now have access to much more information about what is happening locally than they used to have. Though not directly related to decision-making, they also benefit from information they obtain about grants (especially from PPNs) that enable them to finance their own activities.

Some questions ARI members might ask about information provision:

HOW?
- How are we kept informed about what decisions are being made in the local authority and how they are being made? (This could involve meetings, e-mails, focused leaflets, for example). Are the methods used accessible to all of us?

- Do we receive information in a timely way that enables us to share it with the members of our groups so that they can consider plans or decisions?

- How do we in turn relay that information to the members of our groups?

WHAT?
- Do we sometimes need research to help us to understand an issue or to help us to form a view on what is the best way to address an issue? Is research ever made available to us (or to us and other groups affected)?

- Could we help to research an issue?

WHO?
- Are there older people or groups who are affected by decisions who cannot access the information? How to we deal with that – do we need to ask the local authority for different methods, or would training be helpful? Are there any other actions that could be taken to deal with this? (This could, for example, involve postal-mail-outs or making sure that steps are taken so that harder-to-reach groups are assisted to attend meetings)

Step 2: Consultation

Public bodies consult by asking NGOs for their opinion on a specific policy or development. Consultation usually includes informing about current policy developments and asking for comments, views and feed-back. Usually, it is the public authorities (not the NGOs) who decide about what to consult on.

CONSULTATION

Consultation is relevant for all steps of the decision-making process, especially for drafting, monitoring (that is, checking progress over time) and reformulation (that is, changing how a service is being delivered).

ARI members and Consultation

ARI members involved in OPCs are often consulted on strategic plans developed by Age Friendly Alliances. These plans can address a wide range of issues such as outdoor environment, home and community, transport, information and safety, learning and working. For example, a 'walkability' audit was used in several towns as one of the ways that older people were consulted about their physical environments to influence strategic plans. In some places OPCs encourage other specific initiatives in which older people input into design/layout issues in hospitals or other community settings.

Some questions ARI members might ask about consultation processes:

HOW?

- How are we consulted on decisions that are made at a local level? (For example, meetings, invitations to make oral or written submissions, involvement in sub-committees, special focus-groups with harder-to-reach groups)?
- If we contribute at a meeting, do we receive a record of our input? Do we hear how our views are taken on board – and if not, why not?
- Do we have the information we need to contribute our opinions? Are meet-the-expert sessions or question and answer sessions ever organised that might help us to contribute?

WHO?

- Are special measures (like one-to-one interviews or facilitated focus groups) needed to ensure input by members of our groups who are hard to reach (for example, people who are confined to home or people who have difficulty communicating)? If not, how can we access help with this?
- Do we get to hear the input of all groups that may also be affected by an issue so that our approach may be informed by their experience? (For example, do we get to hear from all those who are affected by key decisions such as disabled people who rely on rural transport or who may require care at home)

Step 3: Dialogue

Dialogue can be started either by the local authority or the NGO. Dialogue is highly valued at all steps in the political decision-making cycle, but is crucial for setting the agenda setting at the outset for drafting or formulating policy and for reformulation over time.
The Code envisages two types of dialogue - **broad** or **collaborative**.
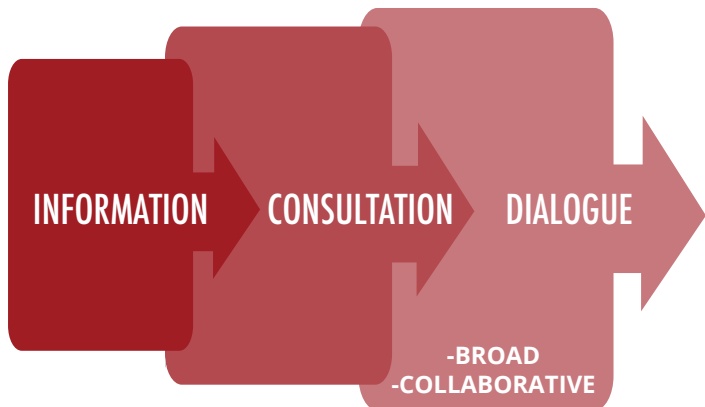
A broad dialogue is a two-way communication to ensure a regular exchange of views. It ranges from open public hearings to specialised meetings between NGOs and public authorities. The discussion remains wide-ranging and is not explicitly linked to a current policy development process.

A collaborative dialogue addresses a specific policy development (for example, an age-friendly town's project or a specific scheme to address transport or housing). Collaborative dialogue usually leads to a joint recommendation or approach. It is more empowering than the broad dialogue as it consists of joint meetings, which are often frequent and regular, to develop core policy strategies and often leads to agreed outcomes.

INFORMATION > **CONSULTATION** > **DIALOGUE**

-BROAD
-COLLABORATIVE

ARI members and Dialogue

Some ARI members are involved in discussions (or dialogue) through their representatives on OPCs and PPNs. Many characterise their input into an Age-Friendly County Strategy as involving dialogue. ARI members pointed to how OPCs and PPNs provided an opportunity for older people to have their say. However, not all felt that they experienced a two-way exchange of views. **Some questions ARI members might ask about dialogue:**

HOW?
• Do we ever campaign or lobby to shape draft policies or to change how a service is implemented through actions like position documents, letters or manifestos?
• Is there a two-way dialogue and exchange of views about the issues that we raise? In other words, do we feel that officials genuinely listen to the issues we raise, respond to them and listen to us again in turn?

WHAT?
• Am I invited to give my views about specific initiatives or developments and do I find that there is genuine engagement by local authorities with the issues that we raise?
• Am I told of the views and aims of local authorities, including what decisions are within their power and what ones are not and why not?
• Does dialogue with local authorities result in shared policies or developments that reflect our input? And if not, do we know why not?

WHO?
• Do these processes include harder-to-reach groups also (so that they have the opportunity to enter into an exchange of views about their experiences)?
• Are there any specific supports that members of our groups need (like training or information or networking or support from other groups) that might help all of us to engage more in dialogue, discussion and in development of joint initiatives and also in monitoring them?

Step 4: Partnership
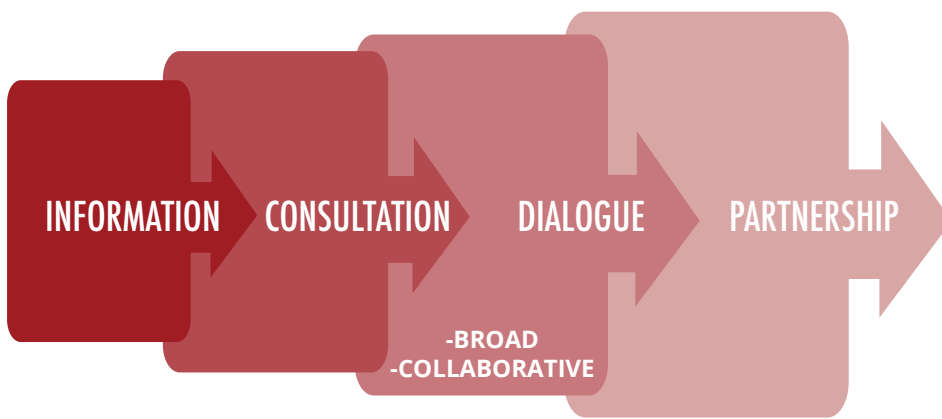
A **partnership** implies shared responsibilities in each step of the political decision-making process from agenda setting, drafting, decision and implementation of policy initiatives. It is the highest form of participation. At this level, NGOs and public authorities come together for close co-operation - while also ensuring that the NGOs continue to be independent and have the right to campaign irrespective of a partnership situation. Partnership can include activities such as delegation of a specific task to an NGO.

INFORMATION CONSULTATION DIALOGUE PARTNERSHIP

-BROAD
-COLLABORATIVE

This might mean, for example, delivery of services, as well as establishing forums where NGOs not only participate but also take part as co-decision-makers, including decisions about how money is allocated. Partnership may take place at all steps of the political decision-making process and is particularly relevant at the agenda setting or implementation steps. The Code envisages joint decision-making through forums, consensus conferences and other participatory meetings as well as co-decision making such as participative budgeting. (This is similar to 'co-production', a term used in community development approaches that means an equal relationship between service providers and users).

ARI members and Partnership

Few ARI members who were involved in OPCs and PPNs characterised their involvement as working in partnership although many were happy with their involvement. But some felt that their input did not get beyond talking – in other words, that it did not influence decisions. It is also true that in Ireland decision-making is very centralised and that, to create a genuine partnership, the structures of OPCs and PPNs would have to challenge traditional, top-down ways of working. This represents a relatively new and challenging approach for all involved. Some questions ARI members might ask about partnership-working:
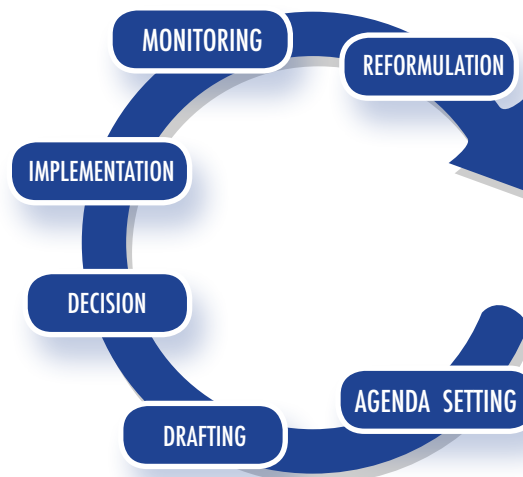
WHAT?
- Do we influence what issues get attention, what decisions are taken, how services are developed and how they are implemented?
- Are we involved to the extent that we have a sense of shared ownership of decisions made by our local authority?
- Do we influence how money is allocated?
- What would need to change in our involvement for us to feel that we were involved in a partnership?

HOW/WHO?
- Do we contribute to the drafting or writing of policies or changes to them?
- Do we attend events (such as conferences, forums or seminars) to discuss the implementation of policy?
- Do we continue to work with local authorities so that our experience (and that of others affected) influences how services are improved or developed over time? (For example, this might mean being part of a permanent or ad hoc expert group to monitor delivery of services).

4. Steps in the political decision-making process

The second aspect of the Code of Good Practice involves a cycle of six different steps in the political decision-making process. These are: agenda setting, drafting of policy, decision-making, implementation of policy, monitoring and reformulation of policy. Each step offers opportunities for NGOs and public authorities to interact. **See diagram below.**

The Code outlines what the role of NGOs might be at each step and what NGOs should expect public authorities to do at each stage in the cycle.

Here we first outline the steps in the process, then set out the potential role and contribution of ARI members to the process of decision-making. Finally, we outline how the Code describes the responsibilities of public authorities at each stage. In Part 2, we set out some questions for ARA members to help them analyse their involvement at each stage of this cycle.

**Step 1: Decision-making Process: <u>Agenda Setting</u>**

The political agenda is generally agreed by government and influenced by the Dáil. However, it can be shaped by NGOs, or groups of NGOs, through campaigns and lobbying. New policy initiatives sometimes result from campaigns of NGOs. During the agenda-setting stage, NGOs often aim to influence decision-makers on behalf of the interests they represent and try to act in a way that is complementary to political debate.

Step 2: Decision-making Process: <u>Drafting</u>

Public authorities often have well-established processes for policy drafting. At this stage, NGOs are often involved in areas such as identifying problems, proposing solutions and providing evidence for their preferred proposal. This could involve, for example, interviews or research. Facilitating opportunities for consultation should be a key element in this step as well as various forms of dialogue to collect input from people and groups who are interested or affected.

Step 3: Decision-making Process: Decision
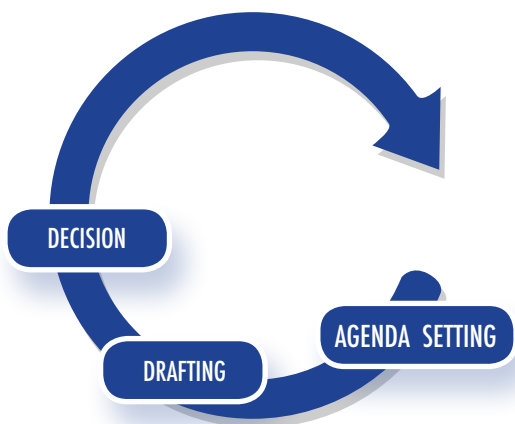
The forms of political decision-taking vary. But public authorities should evaluate different views and opinions before decisions are made. During this step, consultation is central to informed decisions.

However, final decisions lie with the public authorities unless taken by a something like a public vote or referendum or a co-decision mechanism.

Step 4: Decision-making Process: Implementation
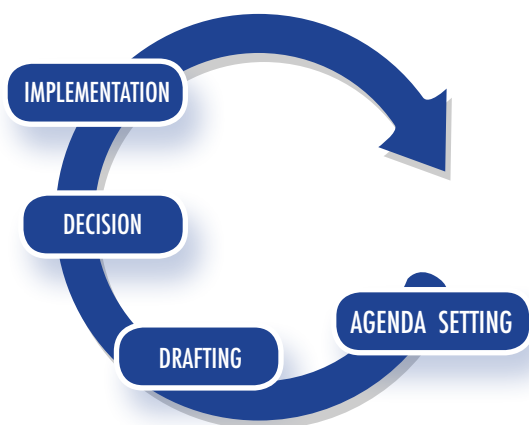
Some NGOs are very active during this stage (for example in service delivery or in the roll-out of a scheme or project). Much of the work done by NGOs in the previous steps includes attempts to influence the implementation of policy. This phase is especially important to ensure that the intended outcome will be fulfilled. Access to clear and transparent information on expectations and opportunities is important at this step, as well as active partnerships.

Steps 5 and 6: Decision-making Process: Monitoring and Reformulation
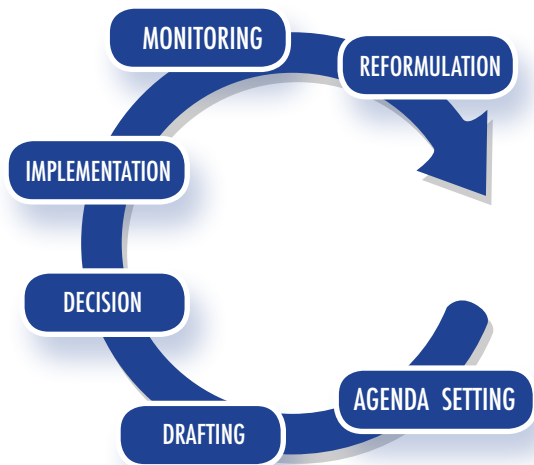
At these stages, the role of NGOs is to monitor and assess the outcomes of the implemented policy. It is important to have in place an effective and transparent monitoring system that ensures the policy/programme achieves the intended purpose.

What can ARI members bring to the steps in the political decision-making process?

The Code outlines suggested contributions of NGOs at **each** stage of the decision-making cycle. The Code groups them under different headings:

- advocating,
- providing information and awareness-raising,
- innovating, acting as experts and watchdogs, and
- acting as service-providers.

The Code suggests that NGOs can be active in these ways during each of the above steps with some assuming more importance at certain stages.

Here we summarise these potential roles and contributions and include some points that ARI members might wish to note.

Advocating

This involves

- **Raising** issues and needs of ARI members – issues that need addressing through (for example) policy measures or service changes,
- **Guaranteeing** that consideration is given to the needs and interests of ARI members affected by a draft policy,
- **Influencing** the decision makers before a vote or decision,
- **Monitoring and voicing** whether the policy initiative reached the people it was intended to benefit and had the intended outcome for society,
- **Lobbying** for renewal of policy by highlighting problems with (or consequences of) current policy to meet the needs of users or citizens.

Some ARI members felt that PPNs linked older people's issues in with other community issues, and in that way brought more attention to issues for older people.

> **Advocating: Some points to note:**
>
> - Social cohesion is fostered when different groups interact, learn from each other and identify issues in common.
> - In some cases, ARI members might also want to consider how the needs of older people that may not be part of their organisation – and cooperation with other groups might assist with this.
> - Society is becoming ever more complex, therefore, including the views of older groups who have been traditionally left outside the mainstream is important to respecting human rights.

Providing Information and Raising Awareness

This involves

- **Involving and representing** your members, and acting as channels to reach citizens; to listen, react and inform,
- **Sharing your experiences** and knowledge with public authorities,
- **Informing members** about the political decisions and processes and their potential effects
- **Explaining** benefits or disadvantages and impact of policy.

> **Information and Raising Awareness: Some points to note:**
>
> Some ARI members are very experienced in advocating, awareness-raising and representation. Others may not be.
>
> - Capacity-building and renewal is an ongoing challenge for all NGOs something that might be helped by:
> - Using expertise already within ARAs to build a sustainable source of knowledge and advice for others
> - Availing of (and advocating for) local training opportunities, including from PPNs (where it may be valuable to undertake it with members of other community-groups).

Innovating and Acting as Experts and Watchdogs

This involves:

- **Bringing knowledge** of a specific topic (ageing in different settings – town, country, community, care-setting?), playing a key role in setting the political agenda and in making detailed comments on drafts and contributions to discussions.

- **Identifying current and future needs** through their experience and analysis (or research) and thus providing crucial perspectives.

- **Developing new solutions** and approaches or practical solutions and concrete models that bring benefits to specific groups.

- **Following the all the processes** involved to make sure that ARA members' (and other older people's) concerns are considered, that the process is inclusive and transparent and ensuring that the policy is implemented as intended.

- **Gathering** evidence to illustrate evolving needs that require a reformulation of policy.

Innovating, Experts, Watchdogs: Some Points to Note:

- Public representatives (T.D.s and local authority Councillors) often do not have researchers or advisors and may be open to information and advice from local groups.

- Your experience and your knowledge of how things work on the ground is a valuable resource to local authorities (and, indeed, central government).

- Complex community issues require flexible and adaptive approaches to implementation and evaluation. ARA members' practical knowledge and experience may be a valuable asset to help monitor and evaluate how a decision/scheme is being implemented and what may need to change over time.

- There is growing interest in community development approaches that draw on the as sets within communities. Sometimes community groups are trained to collect and analyse (in an accessible way) information about the needs and priorities of the community (sometimes known as **Participatory Appraisal**). Is this something to consider with PPNs or OPCs?

Note: Participatory Appraisal approaches are often associated with Asset Based Community Development. More information here .

Providing Services?

Some NGOs also involved in providing services. This can include creating alternative or non-existing services for a specific group of service-users. It might also involve making a contribution crating alternatives.

5. What are the responsibilities of Public authorities in the decision-making process?

The Code outlines responsibilities for public authorities at every stage of the decision-making process. The responsibilities are set out under the headings of information sharing, procedures, responsiveness and resource provision. We summarise them here under those four headings. Don't forget that each of them may be relevant to each stage of the cycle

Information sharing

Public authorities should provide information that is up-to-date, accurate and timely and comprehensive. It should be in an accessible format for all interested people and organisations and should cover:

- current consultation processes,
- current status of policies/approaches/schemes and those currently in the decision-making process,
- implementation of policies, strategies, and public tendering procedures,
- possible review of a policy and of perceptions of changes needed in policy.

Fair Procedures

Public authorities should implement transparent decision-making processes, working to clear, open and accessible procedures for participation. Specifically, they should:

- use minimum consultation standards, such as clear objectives, rules for participation, timelines and contacts,
- provide adequate timelines and means for consultation to ensure participation of different levels of civil society,
- organise open consultation meetings, including invitations to all potentially interested people and organisations,
- follow established rules and regulations for policy implementation.

Responsiveness

Ensure the active involvement of relevant public authority representatives, who should:

- listen, take into consideration and respond to input,
- be available and react to specific needs arising from policy implementation.

Resource provision:
Enable and support the active participation of NGOs through budgetary provision (that is, making money available in some cases), in-kind support or administrative services.

Note: In Ireland in 2016 new guidelines were introduced for Consultation by government departments . These guidelines require that consultation should aim to achieve real engagement and 'real listening' rather than being a pro-forma exercise for bureaucratic purposes. Consultation processes are to be informed by three principles:

- Be genuine and meaningful
- Be targeted at, and facilitate input from, all those with an interest
- Be considered at all stages in the policy process, including development, implementation and review.

Some Links and Resources

Resources and Background Information

Active Retirement Ireland: My Advocacy Toolkit.

The text of the Code of Good Practice for Participation in the Decision-making Process:
https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/civil-participation

Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2012
Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government.

Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme: The Story So Far. A Synopsis of the Learning so Far 2009-2014 and Age Friendly Ireland: Older People's Council Guide

Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme.
http://agefriendlyireland.ie/cities-and-counties-programme/

Information on Public Participation Networks:
https://drcd.gov.ie/community/public-participation-networks/

Information for Public bodies

Department of Expenditure and Reform. 2016. Consultation Principles and Guidance. November. Available: https://www.per.gov.ie/en/consultation-guidelines/

Department of Expenditure and Reform. 2016. Open Government Partnership National Action Plan 2016-2018. http://www.ogpireland.ie/updates-on-the-process/

Information for public servants as to how to involve the community in decision-making.
https://www.dia.govt.nz/Good-Practice-Participate

Community Development

The United Nations defines community development as "a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems." There are different, sometimes overlapping approaches to it. Here are some resources that may help you start to explore these issues more if you wish to do so.

Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2012. Putting Asset Based Approaches into Practice: identification, mobilisation and measurement of assets. Briefing Paper 10.

Inspiring Communities website. http://inspiringcommunities.org.nz/
[Inspiring Communities: an organisation that catalyses locally-led change to achieve sustainable, effective outcomes. New Zealand]

The CLD Learning Partners group. 2015. Measuring and Evaluating Impact and Change from a Community-led Development Perspective. A Discussion Paper –2015

Mathie, Alison and Gord Cunningham (2010). "From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development". Development in Practice. 13 (5): 474–486.

Local and Community Development Working Group. 2016. The Changing Landscape of Local and Community Development in Ireland: Policy and Practice. Conference Proceedings.

Appendix 1: Characteristics of OPCs and PPNs.

Older People's Councils (OPCs) : The Age Friendly Cities and Counties programme is Ireland's adaptation of the World Health Organization Age Friendly Cities and Communities model. Key to this is the establishment of an Age Friendly Alliance, a high-level cross-sector group, chaired by the Chief Executive of the local authority made up of the key Stakeholders (including, for example, representatives of the HSE and other important local players). The Alliance is intended to oversee the realisation of an Age Friendly City or County Strategy that is developed following input by older people. OPCs are intended to be representative groups of older people established by local authorities.

The aim of the OPC is to ensure that the voice of the older person is central to decision-making and to develop and implement an Age Friendly City/County Strategy. The ambition for OPCs is stated as follows:

The ambition of every Older People's Council in Ireland is to work creatively with the Age Friendly programme and the Age Friendly Alliance in each city/county to improve the delivery of services and supports for us all as we age (Age Friendly Ireland: Older People's Council Guide).

Within each local authority area, a consultation process involving older people across the city/county identifies actions to improve the city or county for people as they age, and these actions form the basis of the Age Friendly City/County Strategy. In addition to taking on specific commitments related to the implementation of the Age Friendly City/County Strategies, the OPCs also provide a citizen or service user perspective in monitoring the implementation of those strategies.

OPCs are also promoted by Ireland's National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013), which aims to make Ireland a society for all ages that celebrates and prepares properly for individual and population ageing.

This section is informed by Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme: The Story So Far. A Synopsis of the Learning so Far 2009-2014 and Age Friendly Ireland: Older People's Council Guide

Public Participation Networks (PPNs): Ireland has a very centralised approach to government, something that has been criticised by several international bodies . PPNs were introduced following the enactment of the Local Government Act 2014, part of a process of local government reform intended to create more meaningful and responsive local democracy with options for citizen engagement and participative democracy. A working group on Citizen Engagement was established in 2013 to made recommendations for increasing the participation by people and communities in decision-making process at local government level. The group recommended the establishment of Public Participation Networks (PPNs) in each Local Authority area to:

- Facilitate participation and representation of communities in a fair, equitable and transparent manner.......on decision making bodies,

- Strengthen the capacity of communities ....to contribute positively to the community in which they reside/participate,

- Provide information relevant to the environmental, social inclusion and voluntary sector and act as a hub around which information is distributed and received

Local Authorities were instructed to develop PPNs in June 2014, in line with the commencement of Local Government reform, but many PPNs did not have a secure staffing arrangement until well into 2016. According to the PPN Annual Report for 2016, PPNs are at varying stages of development and levels of activity.

PPNs bring together all the volunteer-led organisations within a city/county. On average PPNs have 400-member groups drawn from environmental, social inclusion and community and voluntary interests. Views of these groups can be brought to policy-makers either through submissions to consultations or through direct participation in decision-making bodies. PPNs elect representatives to sit on various local authority policy and decision-making bodies such as LCDCs (Local Community Development Committees), SPCs (Strategic Policy Committees) and JPPCs (Joint Policing Committees) and are supported by a Linkage Group of members who are stakeholders on particular issues.

Sometimes the PPN structures and the local OPC structures are interconnected. For example, in Donegal, the Older People's Council is becoming one of 7 linkage groups for the PPN (see Age Friendly Ireland: Older People's Council Guide).

The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision-making processes

Four Informing Principles:

PARTICIPATION:

NGOs collect and channel views of the citizens. This is a valuable input to the political decision-making process, enhancing the quality, understanding and longer term applicability of the policy initiative.

TRUST:

An open and democratic society is based on honest interaction between actors and sectors. Although NGOs and public authorities have different roles to play, the shared goal of improving the lives of people can only be satisfactorily reached if based on trust, implying transparency, respect and mutual reliability.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY:

Acting in the public interest requires openness, responsibility, clarity and accountability from both the NGOs and public authorities, with transparency at all stages.

INDEPENDENCE:

NGOs must be recognised as free and independent bodies in respect to their aims, decisions and activities. They have the right to act independently and advocate positions different from the authorities with whom they may otherwise cooperate.

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- Co-production describes an equal and reciprocal relationship between service provider and service user that draws on the knowledge, ability and resources of both to develop solutions that are successful, sustainable and cost-effective, thereby changing the balance of power from the professional towards the service user (see Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2012. Putting Asset Based Approaches into Practice: identification, mobilisation and measurement of assets. Briefing Paper 10)

- See Glasgow Centre for Population Health, 2012. Putting Asset Based Approaches into Practice: identification, mobilisation and measurement of assets. Briefing Paper 10

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- See OECD.2016. Ireland Profile – Subnational Government; and Kelly, O. 2013.' Irish local government too centralised - Council of Europe report'. Irish Times. May 10th.

- The role of each is described in Bourke, S. 2017, "Public Participation Networks in Ireland - reengaging People and the State". In Society Matters: Reconnecting People and the State. Dublin: Social Justice Ireland available at: https://www.socialjustice.ie

Active Retirement Ireland,
124 The Capel Building,
Mary's Abbey,
Dublin 7.

01 8733836

info@activeirl.ie

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