

Active Retirement Ireland:



Toolkit for Participation in Local Decision-Making

PART 2

WORKBOOK

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



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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

This is **Part 2** of a Toolkit developed by Active Retirement Ireland (ARI) for members of Active Retirement Associations (ARAs) who are involved in decision-making structures at county level – most typically, Local Authority Older People’s Councils (OPCs) and Public Participation Networks (PPNs).

This is the practical part of the toolkit intended to help local ARAs to consider how they interact with local authorities using the European Code of Good Practice for Civil participation in the Decision-Making Process (the Code) as a guide. The Code sets out principles designed to promote human rights across Europe and that are intended to improve decision-making, and to guide how NGOs may engage in decision-making. **In other words, what the Code attempts to do is to provide guidance on how ordinary people should be involved in decisions that affect them.** This document is intended to assist ARA members in doing so.

Those who want to know more about what the Code provides, about the benefits of civic engagement in older age, about policies promoting it, about the types of participation that the Code envisages and the responsibilities of public authorities should consult **Part 1** of the Toolkit where we set out the key aspects of the Code and provide an introduction to OPCs and PPNs (in its Appendix 1).

In this, **Part 2**, the intention is to provide a practical workbook based mainly on one aspect of the Code – the steps in the decision-making process - which can help people who are engaged in decision-making processes to examine their involvement in light of the Code, and thus in light of best practice from Europe’s leading human rights organisation, the Council of Europe, about involving people in decisions that affect them. Ultimately this is about trying to strengthen human rights and how democracies operate.

This is about starting to examine the quality of your involvement in decisions that affect you and to start to think how you can use its approach to create change in your community.

It may be important also to say what it is not – it is not a guide or blueprint for how communities develop. We refer to approaches to community development briefly in **Part 1** such as community development approaches that draw on the assets within communities. (If that is of interest, see **Part 1**, where we include some resources relative to asset-based approaches).

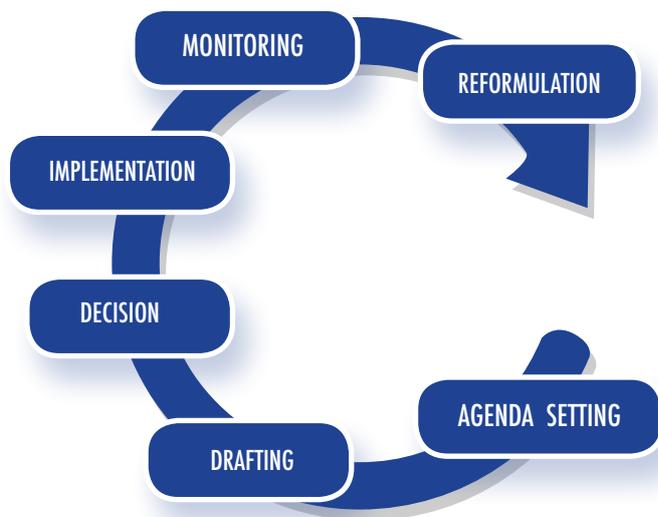
As stated already, this Toolkit is offered as a starting point for engagement. This workbook consists of a series of questions that we suggest ARA members engaged in decision-making processes ask themselves about the nature of their involvement.

The kinds of issues that you may have in mind as you work through the document could be anything that is of concern to ARA’ members. These might include, for example, initiatives to improve public transport, housing, health or well-being, support to live at home, or the physical environment of communities.

2. The Code: Steps in Decision-making and Levels of Engagement

As outlined in more detail in Part 1, there are two key aspects to the Code. It sets out six steps in the policy-making process. These are steps taken by public authorities (like local authorities) 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 ARA members to be involved and to influence. The Code also 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. Thus, there is a continuum of levels of engagement from a low level (provision of information) to ultimately working in partnership.

See diagrams below.

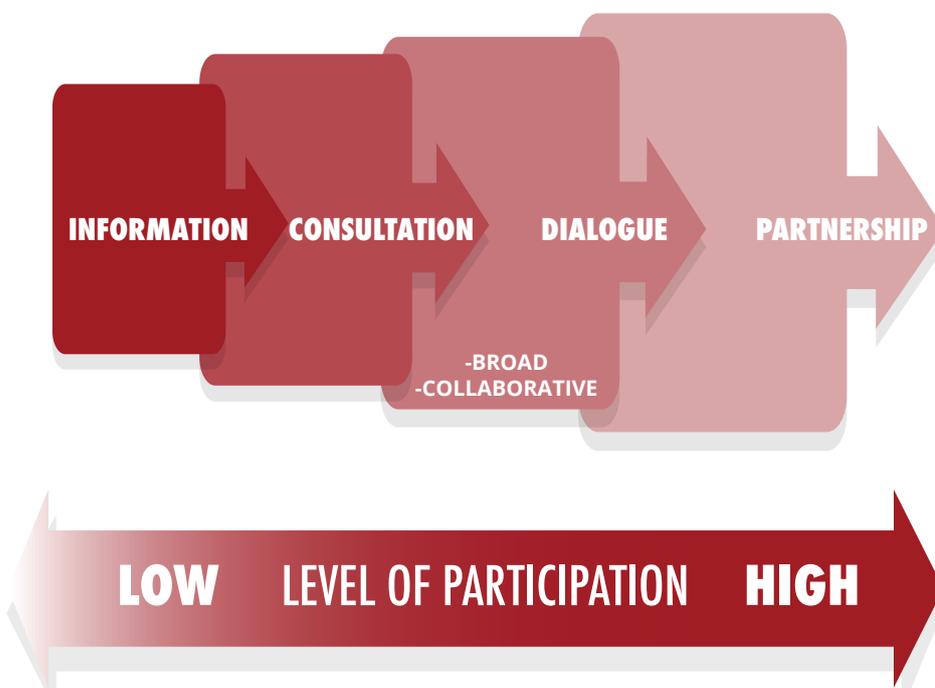


We use the steps in the policy-making process to structure this practical workbook:

- agenda-setting
- drafting of policy
- decision-making
- implementation of policy
- monitoring
- reformulation of policy.

In the rest of this document, we look at each of the above steps in more detail and set out some prompts for discussion.

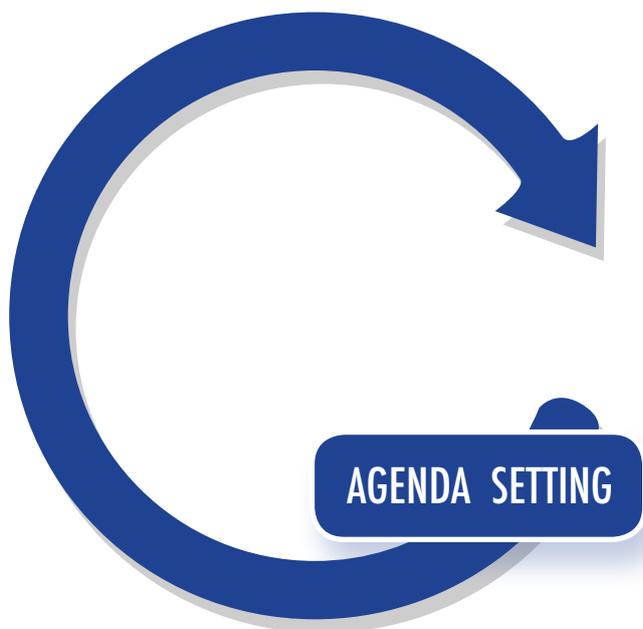
These questions are also informed by the four levels of engagement that the Code outlines and we suggest that ARA members bear in mind that **working in partnership is considered a goal** of participating in decision-making processes (according to the Code).



Some questions may not resonate with you and in that case you may choose to concentrate on others and you should feel free to select from amongst the questions suggested below. On the other hand, if whole series of questions are not relevant to your experience, then that in itself may be worth reflecting on – and the workbook will give you an opportunity to do so at the end.

3. Interrogating your Involvement in the steps in the political decision-making process:

Step 1: Agenda Setting



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 process, NGOs often aim to influence decision-makers.

Questions for Discussion about the agenda-setting stage in the cycle -

Remember, this is about thinking back to the **very start** of the decision-making process. It is about **how issues are selected** to focus on in relation to older people. (Later questions will deal with how decisions are taken, so leave that aside for the moment).

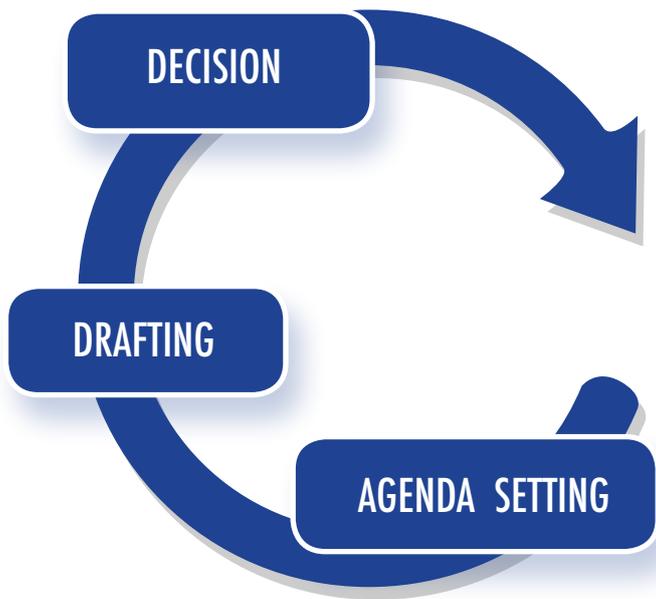
At the outset, who sets the Agenda in your OPC or PPN?

In other words, who decides what issues are most important for discussion or action?

Are you able to influence what issues are considered important enough to be on the agenda (for change, action, improvement)? *In other words, if you raise issues for consideration, are those issues put on the agenda and prioritised and if not, why not?*

Is there anything more that needs to happen for you to be able to influence what is considered important enough to make it onto the agenda for change?

Steps 2 and 3: Drafting and Decision



At these stages, NGOs are often involved in identifying problems, proposing solutions and providing evidence for their preferred proposal. This could involve, for example, interviews or research. Public authorities should evaluate different views and opinions before decisions are made.

During these steps, consultation is central to informed decisions to collect input from people/ groups who are interested or affected.

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

Questions for Discussion about the drafting and decision stages in the cycle

Remember, this step focuses on **how decisions are made** about actions that will be taken – including what alternatives are considered before a decision is made. The questions relate to the process leading up to decisions. (Later questions will focus on how decisions are implemented so leave that aside for the moment).

Have you seen issues you raised lead to decisions that improve the lives of older people? Are decisions taken that address issues that you consider most important? if not, do you know why not?

Do Officials genuinely listen to your views about decisions, take them on board respond to them? *If so, how do you know that they do so?*

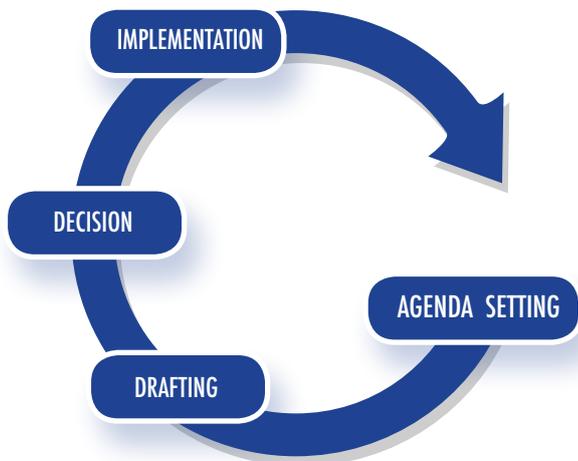
Do you feel that the experience of your members is taken on board and influences the decisions made or options chosen? *Do you put forward alternatives? Is there genuine engagement about what the alternative approaches might be? Could this process be improved?*

Do you have the information you need to help you decide about how issues should be addressed? *For example, might research help? Could your ARA contribute knowledge or participate in research? Are you recognised as contributors to coming up with solutions?*

Are you involved to the extent that you have a sense of shared ownership of decisions made by your local authority? *In other words, does your input result in shared decision or developments? If so, what? If not, why not?*

Is there anything more that needs to happen for you to be able to influence what alternatives are considered, and what decisions are taken for action and change?

Step 4: Implementation



Some NGOs are very active during implementation (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.

Questions for Discussion about the Implementation stage in the cycle

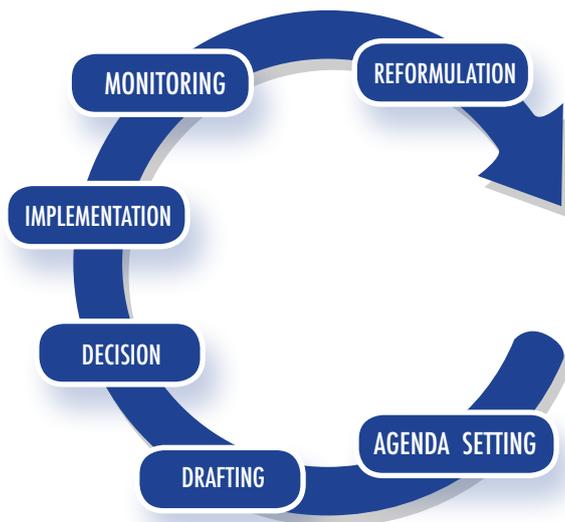
The focus here is on after a decision has been made and a new policy/service/approach is being implemented.

Have you seen issues you raised (or were consulted about) lead to the implementation of changes that have made (or are making) a difference to people's lives?

Are you consulted about how decisions or changes are impacting on your members (or older people more generally)? Have changes reached the people they were intended to help? Are you ever asked to help research how a decision is affecting people? *Was this or could it be useful?*

Are decisions implemented that address the issues that you consider most important? *If not, do you know why not?*

Steps 5 and 6: 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.

Community issues require flexible approaches to project design, implementation and evaluation.

In practice, there is a need to gauge what does/doesn't work as action happens

Questions for Discussion about the Monitoring and Revaluation stages in the cycle

These questions relate to what happens over time in relation to a decision on a policy/service/action.

Once a decision has been made and a new policy or service started (or changed), do you know how it is being monitored? In other words, how do you know it is impacting on the people it is intended to reach?

Have you access to information that proves that issues you raised have led to changes that affect people's lives? Do you have all the information you need to understand if there are unintended consequences (whether positive or negative)?

Do you know (and agree with) how its success is being judged? *Are you ever consulted about what 'success' should look like in monitoring a policy or service?*

Have you been involved in contributing to the reformulation of policies or services - in other words, how it was changed or developed over time so that it would be even more effective?

Is there anything more that needs to happen for you to be able to understand how decisions affecting older people are being implemented and if they address the issues you consider most important?

3. Reflecting on this exercise and identifying next steps

3.1 Have you been engaged in all the steps?

What were the steps in the decision-making process (such as agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation or monitoring) that seemed most relevant to your experience? *Why?*

Were there any of the above areas (such as agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation or monitoring) that seemed not to be relevant to your experience? *If not, why not?*

3.2 How would you Characterise your involvement?

Please consider the different kinds (or levels) of participation that NGOs may engage in in decision-making processes (as outlined in the Code) as set out in **the following diagram.**



These range from simple provision of information to consultation and dialogue (two-way exchange of views) and finally to partnership between NGOs and public authorities, involving shared decision-making and co-creation of policy. (If you need more guidance on what each step entails, see **Appendix 1**)

Do you feel that you are involved in a partnership with the local authority?

If so, outline some of the improvements for older people that your involvement has led to, so that you can clearly see how your actions are influencing change. *What were the key things that led to these successes and can they be replicated in other areas?*

If not, what would need to change for you to have a sense of being engaged in partnership working?. You might consider, for example:

- *how/when you might be consulted and how other groups (say older people with particular needs) might be consulted and facilitated to share their views and to influence decision-making*
- *how your issues might be better taken on board or might better influence decisions*
- *how your knowledge/experience might be used to contribute to decisions and to implementation and monitoring of change.*

3.3 Next Steps

Are there any key actions you would like to take arising from your consideration of the questions in this workbook?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

3.4 Final Words

Congratulations on getting to the end of this workbook.

For some of you, if the questions asked here have encouraged to think more with how you currently engage in decision-making processes or how you would like to do so in the future, you may now want to consult **Part 1** of this Toolkit, which includes more information on the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process and introduces the issue of civic engagement and its benefits more broadly. It also suggests ways that ARI members are already involved in decision-making processes, suggests some further questions about that involvement and outlines the responsibilities of public authorities in these processes.

Appendix 1: Different Levels of Participation:

INFORMATION

A relatively low level of participation which usually consists of a one-way provision of information from the public authorities and no interaction or involvement with NGOs is required or expected.

CONSULTATION

Public authorities may ask NGOs for their opinion on a specific policy topic or development. The initiative and themes originate with the public authorities, not with the NGOs.

DIALOGUE

The initiative for dialogue can be taken by either party and can be either broad or collaborative.

> **Broad dialogue** is a two-way communication built on mutual interests and potentially shared objectives to ensure a regular exchange of views. It ranges from open public hearings to specialised meetings between NGOs and public authorities.

> **Collaborative** dialogue is built on mutual interests for a specific policy development. Collaborative dialogue is more empowered than the broad dialogue as it consists of joint, often frequent and regular, meetings to develop core policy strategies and often leads to agreed outcomes such as a joint recommendation or legislation.

PARTNERSHIP

The highest level of participation where NGOs and the public authorities cooperate closely together while ensuring that the NGOs continue to be independent and have the right to campaign and act irrespective of a partnership situation. Partnership can include activities such as provision of services, participatory forums and the establishment of co-decision-making bodies.

- Council of Europe (2009). Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process. Brussels: CoE See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/civil-participation>.

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