Building Stronger Communities

A practical assessment and planning tool for community capacity building in Scotland

Foreword

Scotland's greatest assets are its people and its communities. At SCDC, we believe in a strong and sustainable community sector as a cornerstone of the sort of Scotland we would like to see in future, a Scotland where people want to live, where they are part of their communities and where they have access to opportunities which will afford them the greatest possible life chances.

The assets based approach, preventative action, community empowerment and strong participatory democracy – all increasingly recognised as important to achieving the best outcomes for Scotland's people - can only succeed if the communities involved are properly equipped to participate and can take advantage of any opportunity that may be available. Community capacity building is an investment in community infrastructure – organisations, skills, influence, networks and local connections - which will pay rich dividends for local communities and which will contribute to the success of any policy initiative.

Building local capacity is increasingly part of our work across all dimensions of the public and voluntary sectors. We are delighted to introduce 'Building Stronger Communities', a practical resource which sets out a common framework to help all partners at strategic, practitioner and community level, work together to assess the strengths and opportunities that lie within our communities. It will help local partners plan where investment is most needed and will provide a guide for planning activity, implementing actions and evaluating impact. In the current context of reducing public services we believe that investment in building the capacity of all of our communities is vital to mitigating adverse outcomes in the longer term, particularly for our most disadvantaged communities. We hope that this resource can help contribute to the development of strong, resilient, sustainable and empowered communities throughout Scotland.

Fiona Garven
Director, Scottish Community Development Centre
August 2012

Acknowledgements

Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) has developed this tool based on the resource *Assessing Community Strengths*[1].

Education Scotland provided funding for SCDC to work with a cross-section of practitioners, managers and community organisations who contributed their experience, views and ideas on how the resource should look and work. This included implementation of the tool in six locations across Scotland to explore how it works in practice.

This tool is an addition to the emerging literature on community capacity building in Scotland, which includes the national guidance 'Capacity for Change'[2] and the *Building Community Capacity* Resource Guide[3].

[1] Assessing Community Strengths, Skinner, S. and Wilson, M., CDF Publications (2002)

[2] See http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/communitylearninganddevelopment/communitycapacitybuilding/capacityforchange/index.asp

[3] Building Community Capacity: Resources for Community Learning and Development Practice, A guide compiled by the Scottish Community Development Centre for Learning Connections (2007)

Contents

What do we mean by a 'strong' community?

A strong community can mean different things depending on the hopes, aspirations and needs of the people that live in a geographical area, or of people who experience issues in a way that creates bonds between them. When people are asked to define what a strong community looks like to them, they may say things like "somewhere I feel safe and secure", "a place where I feel I belong and have a connection with", or "somewhere I can experience a good quality of life". Their responses will usually centre on having access to different services, jobs, education, recreation, care, a secure home or living space and many other things besides. Given that these things affect us all individually, it naturally follows that we will have common interests and issues that affect our community as a whole, and the quality of life we experience as a community. It is not surprising that where we live, work and play is something that is of interest to many of us and an increasing focus for government and public agencies tasked with providing the services that local communities need and want.

What do we mean by an 'empowered' community?

Communities, whether geographical or interest based, are often complex and have a range of characteristics that define them. Sometimes people have little say over the services that are available to them, how they are run and what opportunities exist to help them improve their own quality of life or that of their neighbours, friends and families. The Scottish Government recognises that "often the very things that create disadvantage – poverty, lack of educational opportunity, poor health, and poor transport links – also create barriers to bringing about the empowerment that is one of the key ingredients for bringing about real change."[4]

When we talk about an 'empowered' community it means a community that is organised to take action to bring about change that is of benefit to those that live there. The Scottish Government defines 'community empowerment' as:

"A process where people work together to make change happen in their communities by having more power and influence over what matters to them."[5]

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[4] Scottish Community Empowerment Action Plan: Celebrating Success: Inspiring Change, The Scottish Government (2009)
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/264771/0079288.pdf

[5] Ibid

The Community Empowerment Action Plan goes on to suggest that "Many of our communities, particularly those facing high levels of disadvantage in both urban and rural areas, will need support to help them build the skills, confidence, networks and resources they require on the journey towards becoming more empowered. We call that range of support *community capacity building* and it can be a critical step in laying the foundations for community empowerment. Partners need to invest time, money and skills into work that supports community capacity building if they are serious about community empowerment." Similarly, 'communities of interest' will need support to develop ways to overcome barriers and become more empowered to achieve positive change in their lives.

What is community capacity building?

Community capacity building is a term increasingly used by a range of public agencies that have a responsibility for, or interest in encouraging community organisations to have a greater influence over local decisions, to drive forward community initiatives or to represent community interests. It is described as:

"the activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities."[6]

Whilst much of the support provided to community organisations involves providing the resources they need to operate effectively, capacity building also involves working with local groups to help them understand decision making processes and to develop their ability to inform and influence decisions that affect them directly or indirectly. In this sense, community capacity building is not simply a technical process of providing access to buildings, equipment and funds, but a developmental one where people and groups participate on an on-going basis to develop their learning and expertise so that they are better able to improve their quality of life. It is important that the support process is underpinned by certain values - recognising that people have the right to make their own choices (self-determination), that all sections of the community have the right to be heard and acknowledged (participation and inclusion), and that working collaboratively helps achieve change that is sustainable. This is known as a values-led approach to community capacity building.

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[6] Strengthening Communities, S. Skinner, CDF Publications, 2006

Why is the process of community capacity building important?

Community empowerment is increasingly recognised as being central to the delivery of many policy priorities and aspirations, including public sector reform, service redesign, regeneration and health improvement. The building of strong and influential communities throughout Scotland is fundamental to the achievement of a fairer and more equal society for all. Building stronger communities is especially important where communities, either geographical or issue based, have weak infrastructures, limited access to services and resources, and little support to mobilise or take action on issues that adversely affect them.

Where communities have well developed skills and influence, they are more able to achieve the changes they want to see that will help improve their quality of life. This can be done through engagement with public bodies, by building on communities' own assets and strengths, through campaigning for change and by attracting inward investment. It means an organised community that has the ability to take collective action on the things that matter to them and a community which has the capacity **to plan for change, implement change and sustain change.** So, community capacity building is the process by which public bodies, grant-making bodies and other institutions invest in enhancing the capacity of communities by supporting community groups, particularly in disadvantaged or excluded communities, to play a more active role in civic and economic society.

Community capacity building can have clear benefits for local authorities and other public bodies. Communities have a unique insight into the issues that affect them so their contribution towards developing responses or solutions is both desirable and beneficial. Where communities are able to contribute critically to the development of policies and plans and where they are able to deliver or co-deliver certain services, a resource-effective approach results and a closer and more equal relationship between service providers and the communities they serve develops.

What is the purpose of the tool and how can it help?

This is a practical tool that can be used to assess the abilities and strengths of community groups and organisations to take effective action to bring about change to benefit their communities. It also provides a means to assess the quality and value of community capacity building support that may be available in a given locality, whether a neighbourhood, village, town or council area.

It is designed to support a **participatory approach** for agencies and communities to work together to build and strengthen community infrastructure and capacity. It sets out a three stage process that involves **research**, **assessment** and **planning**.

The first two stages, research and assessment, help local community organisations understand how well organised they are within and across a given community, and help support agencies understand to what extent their support is enabling local people to take community action and get involved in community life.

The third stage, planning, is designed to help community organisations and the agencies that support them work together to develop joint solutions to the issues and priorities raised by communities themselves. Involving all parties in planning for change means that improvements to the quality of community life will be effective and sustainable. This process also helps public agencies make decisions about the investment they need to make in order to ensure that support for communities is targeted appropriately.

What are the strengths of the tool?

Overall, this tool supports a strategic approach to community capacity building, recognising that many different agencies are involved in providing the support community groups need to develop and thrive. In particular, the tool:

- provides a frame of reference for all stages of planning, implementing and reviewing community capacity building work across multiple agencies;
- sets out a process whereby community organisations and representatives have a say in how they are supported;
- identifies the potential characteristics of a strong, organised, community;

- helps support agencies to take a more joined up approach in providing support thereby minimising duplication of effort, and facilitating greater understanding of each agency's role and contribution to supporting communities;

- sets out a series of stages and steps that provides a systematic and robust assessment of community strengths and gaps in support provision;

- takes a research based approach, ensuring support is provided based on the priority needs and issues identified by community organisations;

- facilitates learning about how communities are organised and supports dialogue between agencies and communities; and

- is consistent with current thinking and policies around community involvement, engagement and empowerment.

The application of this tool will be particularly beneficial to: communities or neighbourhoods that are subject to significant development or redevelopment; those where there is limited or problematic engagement with public bodies; those where there is little community energy or activity; and/or those with tensions between different groups.

How does the tool differ from other asset mapping or assessment tools?

Building Stronger Communities is designed to assess and plan for the development of community capacity. It is not designed to map the level or availability of services within a community, such as public transport, health services, leisure facilities or local amenities. These elements might be included in a traditional community profile and are necessary to understanding the make-up of localities and what services are available, but this tool is focused on assessing the strengths and abilities that lie within communities and taking steps to build on these.

It is important to stress that the assessment process is not about focusing on weaknesses, it is about capturing and expanding on the scale and nature of what communities and agencies do well and identifying gaps in support that can be filled. The process employs an asset-based approach as it recognises that community organisations and the people active within them have unique knowledge, skills and lived experience of the issues that affect them, and that those assets should be used to address issues, develop joint solutions and strengthen community resilience and capacity.

The primary purpose of the Building Stronger Communities tool is to provide a framework within which communities and agencies can work together to jointly gather information and evidence to help assess what level of community capacity building support is required. It is not a formal research exercise but a process of participatory dialogue designed to both elicit and share important local information, and to use that information to plan for change.

Who can use it?

Building Stronger Communities can be used by any agency, partnership or group of practitioners that has responsibility for supporting community organisations and wider community activity, engagement and involvement. It is likely that there will be a variety of agencies available to a community which could provide both generic and specialist support. This could range from the provision of grants, equipment and premises to providing training or on-going developmental support.

It is designed to be useful for both experienced practitioners and for those who support communities only as part of their remit. However, it is important to stress that in order to make sure that activity is supported and sustained, a lead agency or partnership must take responsibility for driving forward the process. Whilst it is likely that the assessment and planning process will be instigated by public agencies, staff teams or partnerships, it is important to recognise that the people active within local community organisations and community activities are an integral part of the process. Support agencies will need to think about what resources they need to make sure that community groups and representatives can participate at all stages.

A fundamental principle of good community capacity building is that communities are involved in decisions about the process and do not just participate as 'remote' stakeholders. This will pay dividends in the long run as it means greater ownership of the end results.

Parts of Building Stronger Communities can be used in other settings. For example, the tables can be used in training or in practice development sessions to generate discussion and debate about the characteristics of a strong community, and what agencies can do to support the process of development. The tables can also be used to promote discussion and understanding between agencies about what their respective contributions are to supporting community organisations, with a view to avoiding duplication, pooling scarce resources and improving local partnership working.

It can also be used in training or awareness-raising with community organisations, for example, by using the equalities tables to generate discussion on equalities issues and how groups could tackle barriers to inclusion and involvement to help address inequalities as part of their on-going work. Ultimately the tool and associated templates are designed so that they can be adapted for a variety of purposes to promote community capacity building processes, outcomes and practices.
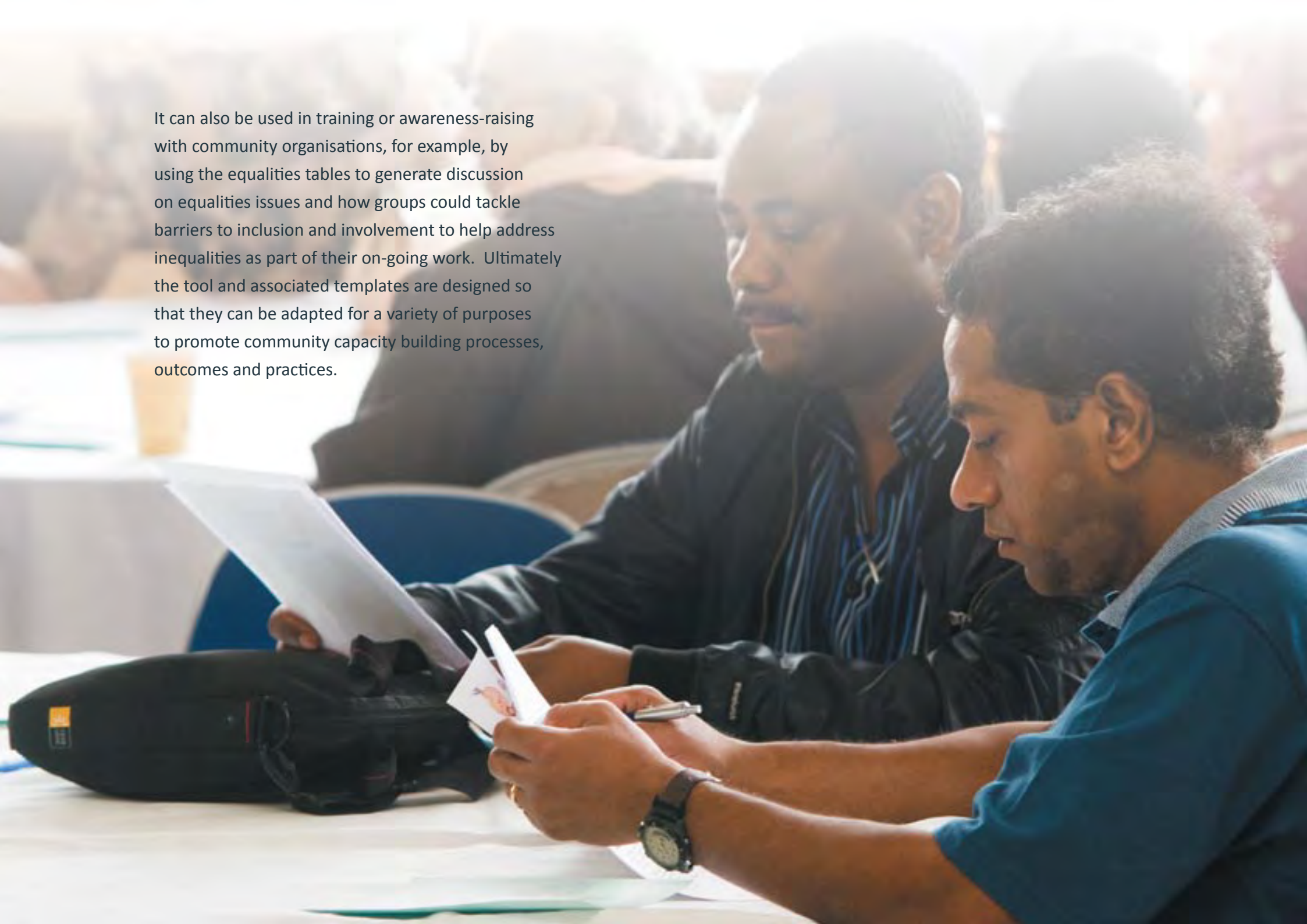
What are the characteristics of community capacity and capacity building support?

Building Stronger Communities focuses on two distinct elements - the level of community capacity and the level of capacity building support. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how strong a community is, it is necessary to assess the range, extent and effectiveness of community activity and how agencies support this to happen.

Community capacity can be understood as having four key elements:

- **Organisation –** local groups, organisations and networks that are well managed, accountable to the community and effective in improving community life.

- **Skills –** the intelligence, understanding, skills and learning that underpin effective action by communities.

- **Equality –** the underpinning value that all actions involve all groups and interests in a community, and that the benefits are experienced by all.

- **Involvement –** this includes the way groups and organisations involve community members, as well as their involvement with other bodies and their influence with them

These four elements can be understood as the characteristics of a community that has the capacity to develop and engage, and they are also the areas in which investment and action can be made by the various agencies concerned to build community capacity.

It follows therefore that capacity building *support* can be understood as having the following four key elements:

- **Building organisation –** the nature, relevance and availability of community development support from statutory sources or from any type of community based support service, such as a development trust, a community forum, a neighbourhood council or similar 'anchor' for community development.

- **Building skills –** what is available in terms of training and development support and access to specialist expertise which should cover organisational, financial and management skills as well as skills for community change such as assessment, planning, organising, alliance building, negotiating and campaigning.

- **Building equality –** to what extent public bodies and partnerships target their attention and resources on those with least capacity,

whether caused by equalities issues, poverty or poor community infrastructure.

- **Building involvement** – how public bodies and partnerships create conditions in which communities are more able to be involved, and able to exert influence over decisions and priorities.

In addition to the elements described above, a further strategic level assessment is required which asks:

- To what extent are community capacity needs assessed and used as the basis for planning and action?
- To what extent is there communication and co-ordination between the range of support providers?
- To what extent is community capacity building explicitly written into local strategies, plans and policy statements?
- What level of resource is available to support or sustain a community capacity building process?

Introducing the three stage process

The process is set out in three main stages:
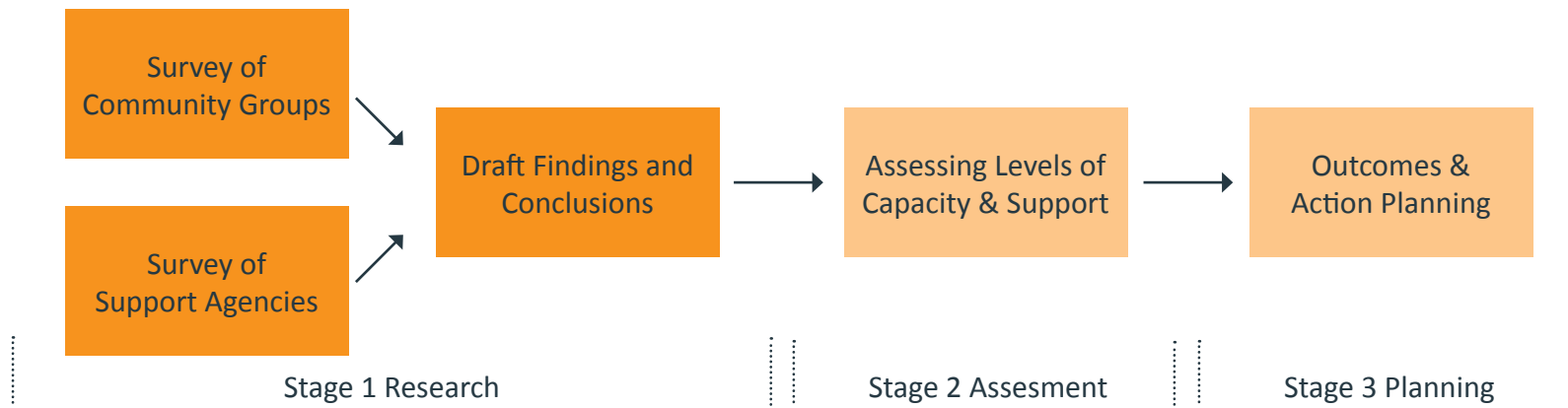
- Stage 1 – Researching the nature and range of community organisations and the nature and range of support being provided.
- Stage 2 – Assessing the levels of community capacity and capacity building support and identifying gaps.
- Stage 3 – Planning: setting priorities and collaborative planning for action between agencies and community.

Getting started

Before getting started it is essential for you to consider the following points to help decide how the tool can be used to best effect. The following questions are useful to consider before embarking on the process.

How much time will it take?

The length of time for the whole process depends on the size and nature of the community being targeted, and the time required for each stage will vary depending on the scale of involvement. For example, if activity is to take place within a small neighbourhood then the number of groups and agencies to be surveyed will be smaller than if it is applied across an entire local authority area, therefore the length of time to carry out this stage will be shorter. This will also affect the other two stages as the number of agencies and groups making the assessment and being involved in the planning will be smaller and easier to organise. Therefore the size of the community can make a difference to the length and complexity of the overall process.

What resources will we need?

Each stage of the process involves organising activities and carrying out tasks, so the biggest resource required is people! It's important to think about who will lead the process and who will help you undertake various activities and tasks. It may be useful to think about **setting up a lead group** to do this, which may involve other members of your team, key partners from other agencies that have a capacity building remit and community group members.

Depending on the type of activities you undertake you may also need access to a small budget to cover access requirements or pay for items such as venue hire and catering.   Different methods can be used to conduct research and undertake assessment, for example, face to face meetings, questionnaires or online surveys. Participatory approaches such as focus groups or community events will require time and commitment of resources. You and/or the lead group will also need to consider the appropriate level of involvement required of both community organisations and support agencies to make the process worthwhile. Remember that if the level of involvement is relatively low it may have an effect on how legitimate people perceive the results to be, and whether or not they feel that they have ownership of the emerging priorities and of any subsequent plans.

What will happen after the process?

Upon completion of the three stages you should emerge with a plan that reflects the gaps in current support and sets out how these are going to be met. This should then be taken forward for implementation. Strategic managers should be aware of the work being undertaken, and that future work will emerge from the process. They should confirm at an early stage whether or not adequate resources can be put in place to implement local community capacity building plans, otherwise the whole process will lose momentum.

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What is involved in each of the three stages?

STAGE 1 - Researching the levels of community organisation and capacity building support

An important feature of the tool is that it focuses on two distinct elements:

1. Researching and assessing the level and strengths of community organisations across a locality or area of specific interest.
2. Researching and assessing the level and strength of capacity building support provided.

Both elements need to be understood to be able to enhance and build community capacity to the highest level possible.

CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

Gathering data

There are many ways in which to gather data that relates to each of the key elements described in section 3. You may want to consider some of the following approaches.

Questionnaires

A relatively straightforward way to research levels of community organisation and capacity building support is to compile and distribute a postal or electronic questionnaire. A sample survey questionnaire which contains a comprehensive set of questions for each of the four key elements is available from the SCDC website (see section 6 – additional resources). Whilst the questionnaire can be used in its entirety, it is intended that lead groups or agencies conducting the survey will review and adapt the content depending on their circumstances (e.g. the number of people available to conduct the survey or the number of groups to be surveyed). It is also important to judge the size of the survey against how many people are available to collate the results, and that the information being captured can be presented in a way that people understand. This is essential as it will be used at the assessment stage so that people can make an informed judgement on the level of community organisation and support that exists in the targeted community.

Individual interviews

Interviews are something you may want to consider either if you have a small number of groups to survey, or if you have had a low response rate from your postal or electronic survey. Whilst it is time intensive, if the work is spread around a collection of people it may be a worthwhile investment to ensure you have a clear enough picture of the level of community organisation in your target neighbourhood or area of interest. Or, you can use interviews as a way of following up with respondents who may have significant views or insights.

Focus groups

Alternatively, you can use some of the questions laid out in the sample questionnaire (or make up your own questions) to conduct focus groups with a collection of representatives from community groups. This is a good way of engaging groups in a dialogue at the initial stage of the process, paving the way for their future involvement at other stages. Focus groups can help you to explain what it is you are doing and why, and generate rich information about the ways in which groups operate and what their issues are. Before using this method, you should think about the resources required for this, who will organise it and who should be involved. If you are conducting the survey in a large area you will need to be clear about whether the people involved are a good enough representative sample of groups operating in that area, or engaged in the particular issue.

Community-led research

Community-led research is a process in which local people conduct their own inquiries into the issues that concern them. In the context of using the Building Stronger Communities tool, it may be the case that the scope and focus of the research have not been instigated by the community itself. However, it would still be considered community-led research if community representatives who carried out the survey in their own community were fully involved in the research design. It may be that some community groups already have research skills and existing connections or relationships with other community groups, in which case they will provide a level of expertise and experience invaluable to the research process. Some local people may require support from the lead group/agency and other support organisations in the form of advice, training and resources. Supporting local people and organisations to conduct community research is a capacity building process in itself and it means community group members develop the necessary skills to conduct other pieces of research in the

future. You should, however, consider whether or not other groups would be happy to share information with community researchers. If they are, and if you have community representatives who are willing to participate and adequate timescales/resources, ARC (Action Research by, in and for Communities) is a useful resource to help facilitate this particular approach[7].

Collating the data

Once you have gathered enough information you will need to collate it in a way that helps people understand the range and nature of community groups that are active as well as the range and nature of support provided by agencies. The data collected will be presented back to people participating in the assessment stage, where they will be asked to make a judgement on the strengths that exist among community organisations across an area or active on a particular issue. For example, if your research showed that 80% of groups in the area were constituted, this helps make a judgement of the levels of governance and management that exist across organisations. This, in turn, helps agencies and groups decide whether or not governance support should be provided to those groups who are not constituted, so long as this is something desired by those groups. Likewise, if you asked how many groups have plans or strategies in place to ensure they have a clear focus for their activities, and only 35% said that they have, you may want to offer a programme of support that helps groups create plans that better reflect their priorities, which can also be used to promote their work.

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[7] See http://www.scdc.org.uk/media/resources/what-we-do/ActionResearch/ARC%20Resource%20Web%20Version%20final.pdf

- Decide who will take responsibility for devising and carrying out the research and the collation of the data. This is likely to include members of the lead group.

- Make sure the scale of the research both in the number of groups targeted and the number of questions is manageable and realistic.

- Ensure the questions are suitable - pay attention to language, the use of open or closed questions, use of jargon and anything that might be ambiguous.

- Determine the most suitable method or range of methods to get the information you need.

- Recognise that some groups may need support to answer questions and this should be made available.

- Explain why you are doing this and you may get a bigger response.

- Agree appropriate timescales and agree who will monitor the progress and take remedial action if necessary.

- Be clear about how you will feedback the results and how this will be done. The National Standards for Community Engagement may be a useful guide to think about this, particularly *the Involvement and Feedback* standards.[8]

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[8] See http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/94257/0084550.pdf

STAGE 2 - Assessing the levels of community capacity and capacity building support

The Building Stronger Communities tool enables you to conduct the assessment stage using a series of indicator tables to determine both the levels of community capacity and the levels of support provided. These are called 'The Community Strengths Framework' and 'The Support Framework'. The frameworks are contained within section 7, and those conducting the assessments (the lead group or agency) will need to become familiar with them in order to support others (the community and agency participants) to use them. They are fairly detailed and it may be useful for the lead group to split into two to focus on one or the other to fully review and become familiar with their contents. This will help create an equal division of labour between lead group members when it comes to conducting the assessment workshops.

The Frameworks

The Community Strengths Framework comprises a series of tables that can be used to assess the capacity of a given community against the four key elements. Each key element is further broken down into a series of sub-headings, and below these are a set of indicators that reflect three different levels of 'strength' that may exist within a community. Each level has more than one indicator and together they paint a picture of what you might expect to see at each level. Here is an example of how the tables are laid out.

Key element →

Sub headings →

Organisation: the development and activity of community groups and organisations and how well they work in the interests of the community				
Governance and management	**Resources and assets**	**Links and networks**	**Effectiveness**	**Accountability and legitimacy**
Do community organisations have sound management and effective decision-making structures?	Do community organisations own and/or have good access to the resources and assets they need to support their activities?	Are community organisations in contact with each other, and with wider networks to access and share learning and ideas?	Can community organisations bring about tangible and beneficial change for their communities?	Are community organisations recognised as legitimate and authoritative representatives of community views and issues and are they accountable to and representative of the communities they serve?

Organisation

	Governance and management	Resources and assets	Links and networks	Effectiveness	Accountability and legitimacy
Green	Most community organisations have governance structures that are fit for purpose. Most community organisations are resilient with the flexibility to respond to a changing environment and new demands. Community organisations are constituted, have published policies and procedures, have business plans, publish annual reports and are compliant with legal and financial requirements. Those with organisational responsibilities have clear roles based on their interests and skills.	Community organisations own and/or control their own assets, and demonstrate sound financial stability and sustainability. Resources and assets within the community are used by a range of community organisations for wider community benefit. Organisations are not solely dependent on public funding and have the means to generate their own funds.	There is a high level of communication, collaboration and coordination of activity through forums, networks or other arrangements, with connection to regional and national networks. Organisations can demonstrate 'collaborative gain' from working on joint projects and sharing resources. Community organisations collaborate on a regular basis and share information and intelligence. Organisations adopt a unified approach to address common issues.	Community organisations act as the leaders and drivers for local change through their own activities and through their influence on others. Organisations have developed projects in direct response to local needs and deliver them effectively. Organisations are successful in placing their issues on the local policy agenda and positively influencing local decision making processes.	Organisations are recognised by local communities as legitimate and accountable representatives. They are recognised by public agencies and elected members and are involved as equal partners in local planning processes and other policy mechanisms that impact on the community. Community organisations are invited to participate in district-wide and/or national policy influence or decision making forums. Individual organisations are recognised by their constituencies and by public bodies as an authoritative voice on the issues they are concerned with.
Amber	Community organisations have transparent operating procedures and a legal status that is relevant to the needs of the organisation and the community. Several community organisations exist and have constitutions and bank accounts. Organisations adhere to their own financial systems and procedures.	Community organisations have access to sufficient funds and resources to support their activities. There is some sharing of resources and some evidence of working together to attract common resources/assets. Some resources and assets exist within the community but they could be used better. Fund raising activities are routine.	Groups occasionally work together on common issues and can demonstrate the benefits of doing so. There is limited contact between groups in the community and some common membership, but evidence of duplication.	Community organisations have clear understanding of needs and issues they seek to address and have plans in place. Wider community issues are understood but organisations have no clear plans to address them. Activities to address local issues take place but they are uncoordinated.	Groups have engaged with the wider community and have evidence to support their actions. Groups are known to elected members and public bodies and are consulted on plans and proposals. Groups hold meetings or other events that community members may attend and express their views. Groups know, and are known by, public bodies but do not engage in wider decision making processes.
Red	There are some community organisations but governance procedures are patchy and groups can operate out with their own constitutional requirements. There are many organisations that have no legal or constitutional status, and do not have financial controls in place. Organisations are led and dominated by a small number of people– only a few strong voices are heard.	Some resources are available but these are limited to each individual community organisation. There is limited ability to attract funding for community activities and projects. Groups have limited or no resources that are available for community benefit or that address community need.	The groups that exist are not known to each other and usually work in isolation. Community organisations openly compete against each other for support, recognition and resources.	Community needs and issues are recognised but are not addressed or acted upon. Groups lack leadership and there are no coherent plans for change. There is limited understanding or recognition of wider community issues. Organisations are barriers to positive change. Activities damage the interests of the wider community.	Organisations operate unilaterally and have no democratic processes in place. The wider community and public bodies are unaware of the concerns they seek to address. Groups are known to public bodies and within the community but are dismissed as unrepresentative or disruptive.

Indicators →

Similarly the Support Framework sets out a series of tables that help identify what support should look like against the four key elements. This helps you to understand and identify the quality and value of the various capacity-building supports that may (or may not) be available. It may be useful at this stage to flick forward to section 7 to see what the tables look like before proceeding further.

Interpretation of the levels – the traffic lights system

Both frameworks have four distinct tables addressing organisation, skills, equalities and involvement. These tables have three different levels – green, amber and red.

Green this level represents a robust level of community capacity and available support and is the highest level of attainment. The statements contained in the green part of the tables indicate that things are going well and that the community has a number of clear strengths that should be celebrated.

Response required - *maintain and sustain*.

Amber this level represents a reasonable or adequate level of capacity and support. Agreeing with the statements in the amber section may mean that some things have to be improved to get to the green level, but that strengths do exist and the focus should be to build on these.

Response required – *build and develop*.

Red this level indicates that there is work to be done! The statements in this level represent areas which require attention and should make participants stop to think why this is the case and how issues can be effectively addressed.

Response required – *review and action*.

Whilst the indicators may be used as they stand, it may be helpful to discuss with community and agency representatives how well the suggested indicators fit local circumstances. The indicators could be adapted for local use following such discussion and agreement. In this sense they are a guide rather than a rigid template.

By far the most important thing about this system is not whether participants agree or identify with red, amber or green levels. It is the *dialogue* that results as a consequence of using the tables that facilitates greater understanding and awareness of how groups and

agencies are working towards the same goals – strong and organised communities. The tool is simply a device to promote this dialogue and in the process build stronger relationships between groups and agencies, leading to better planning and use of resources.

The terminology used may not be easily understood by all those involved, and may require some discussion as to what the terms mean for different participants. In the Support Framework we use the term 'Support Agency' which can include local authorities (in particular their Community Learning and Development service), health improvement services, regeneration teams, colleges, voluntary organisations, housing associations, churches or any other organisation that has capacity building as part of its role. In the Community Strengths Framework we refer to 'anchor' organisations, by which we mean organisations rooted in their community and owned or led by the community. These organisations often provide a focus for community development by providing a common forum, resources, dedicated development staff and a home for a range of community projects and services. Anchor organisations may take the form of community forums, neighbourhood or community councils, development trusts or community based housing associations.

The assessment process

For the two assessments to be made, representatives of both community organisations and support agencies come together to use the information gathered from the research phase and use this information to go through the tables and agree the characteristics that apply to the community they are active in. This is best done in a workshop or series of workshops. There are several ways to do this. For example the assessments for each part of the process can be made at separate workshops, culminating in a shared workshop to present results back to all participants. This could then be followed by a discussion as to how both sets of results compare against each other, with community and agency representatives agreeing further changes to the levels moving up or down through red, amber and green. It may be useful to have both community and agency participants making joint assessments using both frameworks, which allows both perspectives to be applied to the discussions. This allows all participants to understand what is involved in the entire assessment process. How the assessments are made and who is involved will be a decision for the lead group, based on consultation with others, consideration of timescales and resources, and what will help make the process work well. A series of steps that apply to whatever method you use is provided overleaf.

Step 1 – Agree the community and agency participants

Step 2 - Organise the workshop/s and extend invitations

Step 3 – Devise the programme for assessments and agree who will be the facilitators and scribes

Step 4 –Compile the research data that is relevant for each table into a presentable format

Step 5 – Conduct the workshops and record each level as they are agreed (see Section 6 – additional resources)

Step 6 – Compile the assessment report, including the participants, process and assessment results (see Section 6 – additional resources)

Step 7 – Circulate the report to participants and wider stakeholders if relevant

Step 8 – Review the report and prepare to organise the planning stage workshops

Using the tables in the assessment workshops

As the tables are quite detailed it is necessary to think about how they are used. Each of the four tables for both frameworks has a series of sub-headings that make up the characteristics of that element. For example, in the Community Strengths Framework, 'Organisations' has five sub-headings: governance and management; resources and assets; links and networks; effectiveness; and accountability and legitimacy. These are widely acknowledged as the most important factors to assess how community organisations are operating and how well organised they are. You also need to think about how you will present the research data alongside each of the elements and their components so that participants are using relevant information to make their assessment. For example, you might want to create tables for each element that show the relevant data with a space to record which indicators are most applicable, like this:

Resources & assets: the extent to which community organisations own and/or have good access to the resources and assets they need to support their activities

Level	Survey results (20 respondents)	Relevant indicators
AMBER	▪ Most groups (15) are funded by the local council ▪ 5 groups have income from trading activities ▪ 4 groups have a contract with the local council ▪ 18 groups have an income of at least £1000-£10000 ▪ 15 groups have free use of a building for meetings (9 groups use a community owned building) ▪ 15 groups have staff members (full and part time) ▪ 15 groups receive general organisational development support from support agencies, 19 receive some form of support ▪ Most groups have 'no problem' with admin resources ▪ Meeting and storage space are an occasional problem for 6 groups	▪ Groups have access to sufficient funds and resources to support their activities, and have access to community development support ▪ There is some sharing of resources and working together to attract common resources/assets ▪ (Some) organisations have the means to generate their own funds and have control of their own assets ▪ Fundraising activities are routine

Comments and gaps: No significant problems with access to resources were noted from the survey. Group members stated that they were coping with bigger demands with fewer resources, but expressed concern that resources may become a problem in the future as a result of the harsh economic climate.

Action: Maintain levels of support, and investigate potential for expanding use of community building to other groups.

It takes some time to move through these components with participants, especially as they all have green, amber and red levels. Therefore a practical way of facilitating the discussion among participants is to read out the statements in amber level first. This allows participants to say quite quickly whether they agree or disagree, and they can judge whether there should be a move upwards or downwards. Importantly this is also a chance for participants to say whether the statements apply at all, and it may be that they modify or add their own statement that best reflect their own circumstances.

Also, it can often be the case that participants identify with indicators from two levels, this is fine as long as agreement or compromise is reached. As stated before, the agreement of levels as contained within the framework is less important than the discussion and deliberation of how things are and what gaps exist. It is this discussion that is important to record and reflect in the subsequent report, which will influence the plan to be produced. It is also this flexibility that allows agency and community representatives to have a full and frank discussion about how communities work and how they are supported, with a further benefit that relationships may well be developed and strengthened as a result.

One of the other important things to remember when facilitating the assessments is that individual representatives will naturally think about their own organisation when asked to judge on the characteristics identified in the tables. However the focus of the exercise is to judge characteristics across a given community and it's here that the research data comes in useful. If the data indicates that less than half those surveyed have adequate policy and procedures in place this may put them in the amber or red level, or at least suggest that work should be done to help community or agency organisations to improve the policies and procedures in place. So it is important to remind participants that the tables apply to organisations (community and agency) not individually, but across the board. This can initially lead to some frustration among participants who believe that their own organisation is not in the chosen category but it does provide a valuable opportunity for people to talk about their own organisations and how they work, which increases their profile and understanding among others, and helps the assessment process as a result.

- Decide how many workshops are necessary to complete both sets of tables, and if it makes sense to bring both agency and community representatives into each other's discussion, make sure you have the resources and facilitators to do this.

- If possible, give the research data to all participants in advance of the workshops. It will help people think through what the results are, what this tells them and hopefully allow for more informed discussion about the assessment levels on the day.

- Prepare your materials (see section 6 – additional resources to access sample reports, presentations, tables, scribing templates) in advance and ensure that they are in a digestible format – it helps to use blown up versions of the templates and ask participants to 'huddle' round them so they can see all of the indicator statements, then they can judge for themselves whether to move up or down a level.

- Make sure facilitators are well briefed to take people through the process – this means being familiar with the research results, the tables and how to conduct the scoring (starting at the middle and working your way up or down).

- Where participants focus on their own organisation in relation to the indicator tables, you may need to gently remind them that the assessment should apply to organisations across the board, although it's extremely helpful to find out more about what they do!

- Don't forget to appoint scribes! You need to be able to capture not only the level for each theme, but which indicators are being used to justify the level chosen and any additional comments that help 'paint the picture', as well as any gaps in support provision. You could do this as demonstrated in the previous table, adding or deleting indicators as they apply, and recording comments and action at each stage. This will form the basis of the assessment report and is critical to informing the planning process.

STAGE 3 – Participatory planning

This is the last stage in the process and builds on the previous two stages. The research and assessment stages should have produced insights into the current strengths of community organisations in a given locality or area of interest and how support needs are met. Gaps in support provision should be apparent and it is these gaps that the planning process hopes to address. Further to this, issues about how effective community organisations are, how influential they are and how they link together to achieve common aims or address common interests in the wider community should have emerged and the planning process should seek to identify how these can be strengthened and better supported.

The planning workshop/s

The lead group should consider who the key stakeholders to participate in the planning workshop are, and they should include at least some of those who have been involved in the process or any associated activities so far. Make sure that there is enough time to deal with the numbers invited and that the venue and other practical arrangements are in place to cater for your expected audience. Participants should include both agency and community representatives so that both perspectives inform decisions about future priories and how resources are used. The format of the workshop is much the same as the steps mentioned in the previous section, in that the lead group needs to organise the workshop, agree the participants to be invited, plan the programme, provide facilitation and record the discussion.

A useful approach to use for the planning process is the LEAP framework[9]. It supports a participatory approach to planning and it sets out a series of steps/questions that forms the basis of the workshop programme. The steps and relevant questions for each are:

- Assemble the stakeholders (who are the relevant key stakeholders?)
- What are the issues or needs we want to address? (priorities emerging from the research and assessment phases)
- What are the changes we seek? (represented as outcome statements)
- How will we know that change is taking place? (represented as indicators, quantitative and qualitative)
- What resources do we have or need? (lead agencies, community, budgets/funds)

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[9] See http://www.scdc.org.uk/what/LEAP/

- What action will we take? (who, when, where and with whom)

- What methods will we use? (what will help us best achieve the change we desire?)

- Who will monitor that the plan is being implemented? (who, when and with whom?)

- When and how will we review our impact and learning?

The workshop can be built around these key questions and again it is important that the lead group identifies who will facilitate the workshop and how it is recorded. At the end of the workshop you should emerge with a detailed plan of how the issues identified will be progressed, how this will be resourced and who will be involved in implementation. You may need a series of planning workshops to get to this stage, depending on the scale of the community you have been targeting and who is involved.

Summary of the Process

At all stages in the process it is worthwhile remembering that the goal at the end is a greater understanding of how to help communities be stronger and more organised, which is the basis for them to be more effective in influencing decisions about things that affect their daily lives. The purpose of this tool is to assist community organisations and the agencies that support them to participate in a deliberative dialogue about how partners contribute towards this goal. It is a robust and systematic approach to assessing and planning for community strengths, and one which can be adapted to suit the needs and circumstances of the community it is being used with. Users of this resource are actively encouraged to adapt and improvise how they use it in association with any other tools, frameworks, methods and way of working that produce the results aimed for.

For further information on the tool, and for additional support and guidance please contact us at info@scdc.org.uk

Building Stronger Communities: Case study – Pilot Project in Livingston, West Lothian

1. Background and context

In February 2011, West Lothian Regeneration Team successfully applied to participate in the Community Capacity Building (CCB) Support Project. The Project, funded by Education Scotland and delivered by the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), was designed to provide support to local agencies to adopt a strategic approach to community capacity building by using the Building Stronger Communities tool (the earlier verson of the resource was called SCORE). The tool sets out a series of specific activities and participatory methods to gauge the level and nature of community groups across an area, and the level and nature of support provided to them by local agencies. The ultimate goal is to create a strategic plan that responds to any gaps in support and builds on existing community strengths and infrastructure.

The Regeneration Team decided to concentrate the Project in the Livingston area and a lead group comprising representatives from local statutory and voluntary support providers was set up to jointly implement and oversee the Project with SCDC. The group comprised representatives from regeneration, community learning and development, health improvement, tenant participation and the local voluntary sector intermediary organisation. The Project ran from March to June 2011.

2. What happened?

The process followed the three main stages set out in the tool: research, assessment and planning.

2.1 Conducting the research

The first main activity was to carry out two surveys: one with community groups across Livingston and one with support agencies.

2.2 Community strengths survey

For the community strengths survey, the lead group compiled a wide-ranging list of community groups and organisations in Livingston.

Given this is an area with approximately 63,000 people,[10] the number of groups active in the area was estimated to be well over one hundred. In order to make the survey manageable, the lead group used the definition within the tool to identify which groups were most relevant to include and a total of fifty two groups were contacted to complete a survey questionnaire. The survey was created using the sample questionnaire of the tool and sent out by post. To maximise responses and in recognition that some groups may require support to fill it out, a participatory workshop was organised for community groups to fill in the survey 'on site' with the help of lead group members. Ten groups were represented at the workshop and a combination of voting pads and paper questionnaires was used to capture responses to questions that voter pads could not accommodate. The workshop was followed up with individual meetings conducted by lead group members to improve the response rate. This led to a total of twenty three questionnaires being completed for use in the next phase: the assessment.

2.3 Community support survey

For the support agency survey, again the lead group used the sample questionnaire from the tool to create an electronic survey using Survey Monkey. Twenty one agencies participated and their responses were collated for use in the assessment workshops.

The responses from both surveys were captured and entered into survey monkey, which meant they could be shared and used by support agencies beyond the scope of the project. In making the data usable for the assessment workshops, key facts and figures were highlighted under the four key themes: organisation, skills, equality and involvement.

2.4 Making the assessments

The lead group decided to hold the two assessment workshops on the same day. The morning programme was designed for community group representatives and a total of five group representatives attended. This was followed by a networking lunch so that community group members attending the morning workshop could come into contact with agency staff attending the afternoon assessment workshop. Thirteen local agencies were represented in the afternoon session.

Both programmes followed the same process – presenting the data collected from the surveys and asking participants to use this

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[10] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livingston,_Scotland

information to work through the indicator frameworks and identify strengths and gaps. The collective scores and comments for each were captured by lead group members for use in the next phase: strategic planning.

2.5 Planning a strategic response

The strategic planning workshop involved five agency and two community representatives, and the focus was on creating a strategic plan that would respond to the issues raised in the research and planning phases. Participants used a points-based system to prioritise the issues raised in the assessment process. A list of the issues was presented on flip chart paper and each participant was given a red, blue and yellow dot and asked to place them against their three top priority issues (red = 3 points, blue dot = 2 points and yellow dots = 1 point). The results were as follows:

- **Improving planning ability (14 points)** – skills and training for effective planning.
- **Skills development (9 points)** – matching groups' needs with the support being provided.
- **Community engagement (7 points)** –building awareness of and developing good practice (community organisations and support agencies).
- **Locality planning (4 points)** – building awareness and understanding of locality planning and community engagement structures, processes and opportunities.
- **Involvement & inclusion (3 points)** – suggestions were made to provide more support for groups to attract more members, and involve different sections of their community more.
- **Understanding and awareness of community capacity building (3 points)** – creating more opportunities for dialogue with senior managers and elected members on the community capacity building purpose and process would be beneficial in securing greater recognition and investment in support for communities. This is particularly relevant to minimise the 'short-termism' often applied to the resourcing and support of community organisations.
- **A focus on equalities (1 point)** – participants suggested training and awareness-raising of equalities issues for groups could be a specific and explicit focus for agencies.
- **Networking within communities & agencies (1 point)** – one participant suggested more use of 'twitter' and other social media to stimulate more community involvement/activity and increased networking.

From this, the following outcomes were identified:

- 'Community organisations effectively plan for changes to benefit the community they serve'
- 'Community organisations and support agencies have the skills to meet the needs of their communities'
- 'Community organisations and support agencies are better equipped to conduct and participate in quality engagement with communities'

These outcomes were thought to reflect the need for both community groups and support agencies to develop their skills to better engage with each other, and work together to ensure communities' needs are being met.

3. What happened next?

Having created the basis for a strategic plan, the next step was to identify who would implement the plan and take the lead on coordinating strategic activities. After the end of the project, follow up meetings were held and it was agreed that the Regeneration Team would take responsibility for the plan. The team organised a community conference to present the proposed outcomes to community group representatives in West Lothian, and seek their views on whether or not the priorities were on target. Conference participants identified the outcomes as either important or very important which provided further endorsement of the strategic priorities for partners to strengthen community infrastructure and a clear mandate to work to achieve the outcomes derived from the Project.

4. What were the benefits?

In evaluating the process and the tool, lead group members identified three main benefits. These were that:

- The indicators helped to facilitate discussion and reach agreement on a consensus about what the current state of play is regarding community groups activity and community capacity building agencies' support;
- Conducting both surveys and using this as a way of informing people about the nature and extent of community groups/community capacity building support was helpful and adds legitimacy to the findings;
- The participatory nature of the approach helps bring groups and agencies together around a common agenda to strengthen local communities.

5. What else did they say?

Lead group members also pointed out a few caveats when using the tool, in particular that timescales have to be appropriate to the scale of work being conducted. The timescales for the project were fairly tight and this affected the notice given to agency and community representatives to attend assessment workshops, this being reflected in the low participant numbers for the community strengths assessment workshop.

Lead group members advised that the language being used must be understandable to those being asked to participate, avoiding jargon and ensuring terms and concepts were being explained and clarified. Also, in order to invest their time and energy, participants need to see the value in what is being done and understand what the process is trying to achieve. In conclusion, whilst the work was at times intensive and arguably complex, many people gave up their time to participate at the various stages, suggesting a coordinated, evidence-based approach to supporting communities is a worthwhile endeavor and one well received by local stakeholders. In the words of one participant, 'well done to whoever thought this up!'

For a comprehensive account of the entire process and all the materials used, you can access the full project report by contacting us at info@scdc.org.uk

Building Stronger Communities: Case study – Pilot Project in Inverclyde

1. Background and context

In March 2011, the Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), was contracted by CVS Inverclyde, in partnership with Inverclyde Council's Community Work Team, to ascertain the current strengths of the community in Greenock Central and East area and to determine what services would have the greatest sustainable impact on building community capacity. The assessment was undertaken by two SCDC staff members during June 2011 using the Building Stronger Communities tool. The ultimate goal was to create a strategic plan that responded to any gaps in support and would build on existing community strengths and infrastructure.

2. What happened?

The process followed the three main stages set out in the tool: research, assessment and planning.

Conducting the research

The first step was to identify the key community groups and agencies responsible for community capacity building within the Central and East area of Inverclyde. Four agencies and nine community groups were identified as having a particular role in community capacity building and were invited to separate meetings to work through the framework. The initial approach of having separate meetings was to ensure that each group could discuss their own perspective honestly and openly without being influenced by comments or opinions of the other group.

All four agencies attended the support agencies session to work through the framework and a total of nine people from the nine targeted community groups attended the community groups session. Those who did not attend were subsequently sent a questionnaire which covered the same ground as the focus for discussion.

Community strengths session

This was conducted during the evening to maximise attendance and those attending were given a brief introduction to the purpose of the meeting and to the overall structure and content of the framework. Subsequent discussion was facilitated by a member of SCDC staff but it was very much left to the community representatives to discuss the issues identified through the framework and to decide the score which best reflected where they saw themselves in relation to each issue. In order to do this systematically the group was provided with A3 sheets which contained questions relating to each part of the framework and boxes which allowed the group to agree a score, on a range between 1 and 6 (1 being unsatisfactory and 6 being excellent) , which best reflected where they saw themselves in relation to each issue. The sheets also provided a comments space beside each question which allowed the group to make short statements or comment on why they had decided on the score they had given themselves. In addition the SCDC facilitator noted key discussion points for future reference.

Community support session

The meeting attended by the agency staff was conducted very much in the same way, with a member of SCDC staff in attendance to explain the purpose of the meeting, provide background information on the framework and facilitate discussion. As with the community strengths meeting the group was given A3 sheets with the appropriate questions and scoring criteria which were used as a framework for discussion and for recording scoring. The SCDC facilitator again took notes on key discussion points.

Making the assessments

From the scoring and notes made at each of the meetings, and having confirmed accuracy with participants, the SCDC facilitator was able to analyse the information and identify a) areas where community groups felt they did not need support and areas where they felt additional support was required; and b) where agency support was currently being directed and where support was not. As a consequence key areas were identified where support could be directed by agencies in order to make the biggest impact on community capacity.

Planning a strategic response

From the above process SCDC produced a series of specific recommendations relating to each of the four elements of the framework. These are:

Building Organisations: the development and activity of community groups and organisations and how well they work in the interests of the community

Example Recommendation: Undertake a training needs analysis and subsequently implement an adequately resourced training programme for community group members.

Building Skills: ways in which groups can build the skills, knowledge and confidence of the members to enable them to be effective in achieving their aims and to fully participate in and benefit from community activity

Example Recommendation: Agencies co-ordinate their resources in order that these are targeted to ensure the greatest benefit for groups to develop their skills, confidence and ability to participate effectively.

Building Equality: the extent to which community and voluntary groups are inclusive and work to build equality in their communities

Example Recommendation: Support is required by community groups to develop their ability to better engage with their local community, better understand local issues and reflect these, and at the same time increase support for their activities from within the community.

Building Involvement: the extent to which community organisations encourage local involvement and influence decision-making and change

Example Recommendation: There is a need for better joint working between agencies**.** There needs to be consistency of commitment to engaging with the community and community organisations, and resources should be found to support this development. Community representatives noted a need for training in the National Standards for Community Engagement which may be a useful starting place for both parties.

3. What happened next?

Having received and accepted the contents of the report both CVS and support agencies revised the emphasis of a funding bid to the Big Lottery which was successful. The focus of the bid, and that of day to day support, changed from the existing practice where the emphasis had been on CVS and agencies using their staff to provide support to groups, to one where emphasis was placed on providing training and promoting interaction between groups. The result was to support the capacity of groups to develop their own skills and abilities rather than rely on external support.

For a comprehensive account of the entire process and all the materials used, you can access the full Project Report by contacting us at info@scdc.org.uk

SECTION 6 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There are a number of useful tools, frameworks and templates that you can use as part of the process. These are listed below and are available through the SCDC website www.scdc.org.uk or via the links contained in the body of the guide.

Frameworks and Resource Guides

1. The National Standards for Community Engagement
2. LEAP (Learning, Evaluation and Planning)
3. ARC (Action Research by, in and for Communities)
4. Building Community Capacity Resource Guide

Sample Templates and Reports

1. Community Strengths Sample Survey Questionnaire
2. Support Agency Sample Survey Questionnaire
3. Community Strengths Research and Assessment Recording Sheets
4. Support Agency Research and Assessment Recording Sheets

The Building Stronger Communities tool is available to download from the SCDC website. Please remember to acknowledge any materials that are reproduced or copied.

This section introduces both frameworks of the tool. The frameworks can be downloaded from www.scdc.org.uk/what/building-stronger-communities and are provided as inserts at the back of the hard copy of the resource. They are designed so that they can be reproduced and used within assessment workshops and/or training sessions. A short strategic framework is also provided within this section to help agencies plan a community capacity building strategy.

The Community Strengths Framework

A strong community is one which is organised and this is often visible in the range and extent of community groups that exist within and across neighbourhoods, towns and cities. Community organisations can come in all shapes and sizes but they share common characteristics that reflect their ability to achieve positive changes for the benefit of their wider community. In order to be effective in doing so, community organisations should be able to demonstrate: how they work to achieve wider community benefits; their skills and confidence in taking community action; how they work to build equality and identity between groups and interests; and their ability to influence decisions that affect their quality of life. The indicators in this section can be used to assess the strength and effectiveness of communities and the organisations that operate within them.

The Support Framework

Groups and organisations that do not have the capacity to act effectively may need support to increase their ability and confidence. Even where communities are well organised and able to act effectively, it will be helpful for them to be able to do so in an environment that is encouraging and receptive. Thus a community capacity building strategy needs to be based on an understanding of the position of both communities and the support agencies. The needs and priorities for action will be identified in communities, but the capacity building action itself will need to be based on a sound understanding of the ability of support agencies to establish a common understanding of need, and to work together to address it as effectively as possible. This part of the framework should be used to assess the nature, quality and reach of the various agencies that can support building community capacity as a basis for decisions about how to improve their service.

Towards a Community Capacity Building Strategy

Using Building Stronger Communities is a useful way to gather baseline information and identify priorities around which a community capacity building strategy can be developed. A community capacity building strategy is essential to ensure that the support being provided to community organisations is consistent with policy and strategic priorities. It should be based on the clear needs and aspirations of community groups and be co-ordinated between agencies to avoid duplication, pool resources and contribute towards a culture of learning and sustainability. The indicators here can be used to assess and develop a comprehensive community capacity building strategy.

A strategic approach: An effective community capacity building strategy will have the following characteristics:	
A policy driver and framework	Community capacity building will be strongly embedded in key policy priorities, for example the Single Outcome Agreement, and the reasons for it being placed there will be clear and persuasive. Provider organisations will systematically develop clear policies and strategies to maximise the impact of their role in communities. Within this wider policy framework there will be a locally agreed strategy on support provided (advice, resources and funding).
Clear understanding of needs, issues, provision and gaps	There is a clear, tested and documented justification of the priorities and purposes of community capacity building interventions. Advice, funding and resources are based on systematic assessment of needs.
Organisational co-ordination and collaboration	The various organisations supporting community capacity building co-ordinate their activities and efforts to avoid duplication and to ensure gaps in provision are addressed. Support agencies learn from the experience of each other and from community groups. There is regular provision of training to staff and partnerships to increase their ability to work effectively with communities.
A developmental culture	The culture and style of provision is based on participatory and inclusive values; will be 'on tap, not on top'; and will be responsive to community needs and priorities. Provider organisations will systematically address their own training and learning needs to enable them to work more effectively in communities.