Participatory Budgeting Case Study
Executive Summary

Fife Council

The Democratic Society
May 2017

Summary

In Autumn 2016, Fife Council ran a participatory budgeting exercise in the Cowdenbeath area. ‘Oor Bit Fife – Places and Spaces’ provided the opportunity for people to suggest and then vote on ideas that could receive part of a £250,000 pot of funding which was made available by the Cowdenbeath Area Committee.

The Council was supported by a team from The Democratic Society to select, embed and test two digital tools which were provided as part of the ‘Digital Tools for Participatory Budgeting in Scotland’ programme.

Key Stats

- 166 idea contributions (Your Priorities website)
- 32 ideas progressed to the voting phase
- 1,406 eligible votes
- 568 (40%) people voted online (D21 website)
- 838 (60%) people voted offline (paper ballots)
- 90.38% of respondents agreed the website was a good way to take part in decisions
- 88% of respondents said that they would consider using a website like this again.
Key learning points

The steering group model strengthened the process
This model enabled the Council to bring together volunteers from different areas of Cowdenbeath for direction and support. Additional benefits included interest in developing cross-area work, and sharing of local knowledge and experiences.

Plan training, support and information before the process starts
A longer lead in time can ensure that those leading engagement activities receive necessary information, training, and can identify ongoing support needs.

Map out the entire process at the beginning
A clear process, mapped out from beginning to end, will ensure that those leading engagement activities have the necessary overview, can identify opportunities and pinch points, and can also keep members of the public better informed.

Provide a clear explanation for any ideas removed from the process
Ideas removed from the process at the sifting stage were recorded on a spreadsheet, but feedback suggested that this did not provide adequate information for some members of the public. It’s advised to provide feedback at every stage of the process and, where possible, to directly inform participants why an idea was withdrawn.

Interoperability and consistency between online and offline processes
Traditional forms of engagement worked alongside online tools – attending events, doorknocking, street outreach. Postcards were created for offline idea generation, and paper ballots that could be scanned into the D21 website were created for voting. The same information should be captured both online and offline (e.g. email address). All of the ideas generated offline should also be uploaded to the website, so the ideas are all accessible in one place. This might require a dedicated staff member(s).

Low verification, high trust worked well for this process
The steering group felt the approach was appropriate for this process and possibly helped boost engagement. Analysis of participation through voting system did not suggest any suspicious activity, so trust during this process seemed well placed.

Go where people already are
Dedicated PB events held in the 8 areas across Cowdenbeath had mixed results. The takeaway for the steering group was ‘go where people already are’. It would be helpful if the Council could provide resources such as stalls and promotional materials.

Next Steps

Fife Council is working on delivery of the winning projects. The steering group have noted that they want to continue participatory budgeting in the Cowdenbeath area and they hope to undertake another exercise in the near future.
Further information

Online tools

Idea Generation Tool, Your Priorities: https://oorbit-fife.yrpri.org


Participatory Budgeting in Scotland

The Democratic Society
demsoc.org/participatory-budgeting-in-scotland

Scottish Government – Participatory Budgeting
gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/Participatory-budgeting

PB Scotland
pbscotland.scot

PB Network (Scotland)
pbnetwork.org.uk/category/geographic/scotland

The Democratic Society

Better democracy, everywhere

The Democratic Society (Demsoc) works for more and better democracy, where people and institutions have the desire, opportunity and confidence to participate together.

We work to create opportunities for people to become involved in the decisions that affect their lives and for them to have the skills to do this effectively. We support governments, parliaments and any organisation that wants to involve citizens in decision making to be transparent, open and welcoming of participation. We actively support spaces, places and processes to make this happen.

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