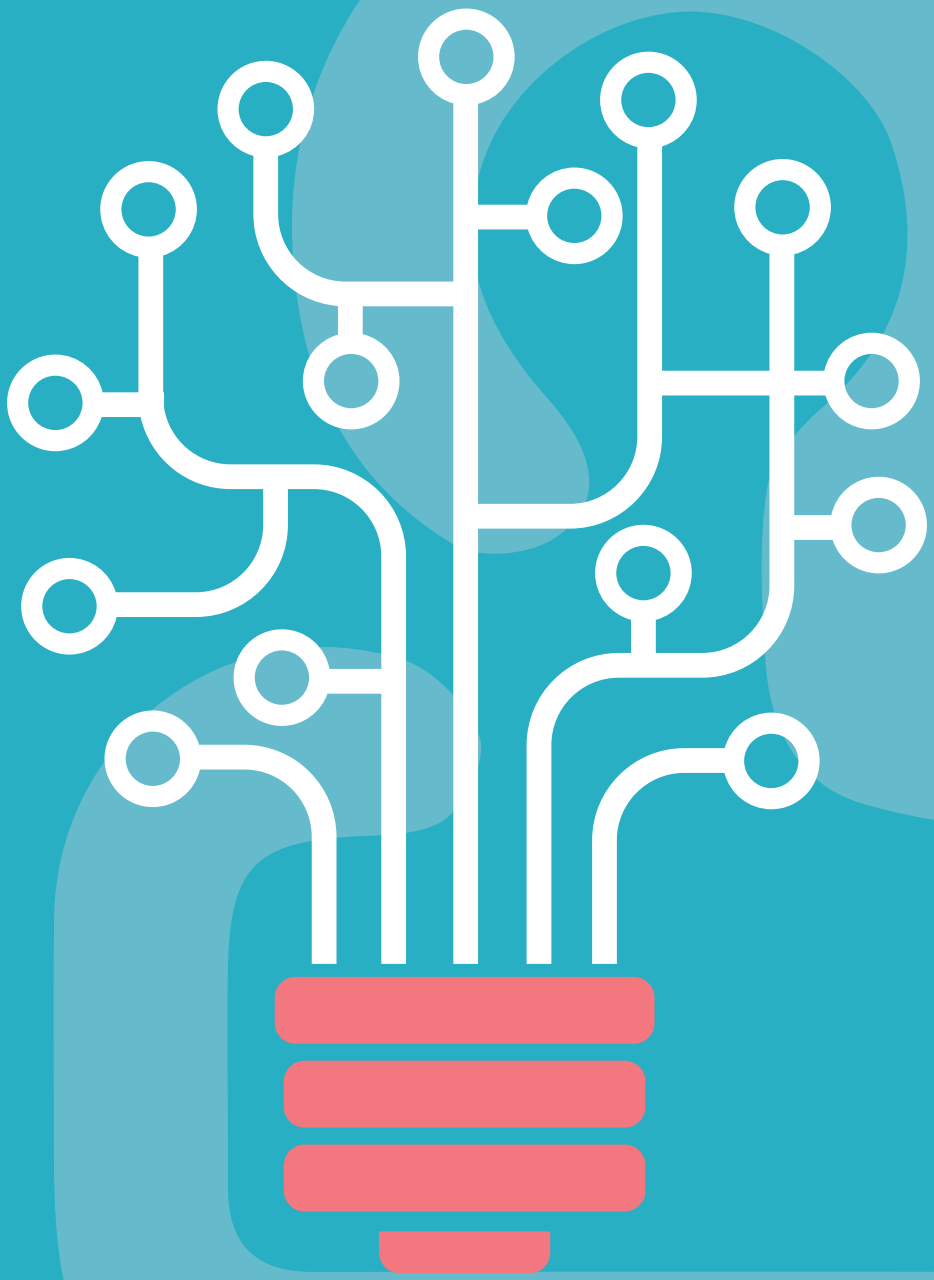
# Engaging with evidence:

## How communities can get and use evidence

October 2019



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# Introduction

## If we want to have influence over what happens in and to our communities, we need to engage with evidence.

That's the starting point for this guide.

More and more, people are talking about communities engaging in evidence. This includes taking part in the design, collection, analysis and use of evidence. There is an increasing understanding that evidence can be stronger and more useful when communities bring their time, knowledge, experiences and perspectives to bear. This is being encouraged by government policy, funders and community members themselves.

The Knowledge Translation Network wrote this guide because there are lots of different terms and approaches, and it's easy to get lost in the language. This guide aims to introduce what is meant by communities engaging with evidence and why it is important. It also outlines some of the main ways communities can engage with evidence.

It is not a guide to how to do it. Lots of good practical toolkits and materials exist and are referenced throughout this guide.

**The guide has been divided into four parts:**

**Part 1 -** starts with the basics, giving some imagined **examples** and exploring **what is meant** by 'community', 'evidence' and what it means to 'engage' with evidence.

**Part 2 -** looks at what might be **encouraging** communities to engage with evidence. It contains **policies** that call for communities to think about, find, analyse and use evidence. The strength and creativity of Scotland's **community sector** is also highlighted as a reason for the growing interest in this area.

**Part 3 -** shines a light on some of the more well-known **approaches** communities can use to engage with evidence, and links to a range of useful **guides and tools** for further information.

**Part 4 -** provides some short **case studies** in which communities have engaged with evidence in different ways.

# Who is this guide for?

This guide is for anyone, but mainly those in the community and voluntary sector, who want to know more about this area.

### This includes:

- Community and voluntary organisations
- Community members and volunteers

### The guide is also useful for:

- funders and commissioners
- policy makers, researchers and planners

This short resource builds on a series of introductory guides on evidence by the *Knowledge Translation Network*.

### These are:

- Evidence for Success: The guide to getting evidence and using it *http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/270/*
- Collaborating with academics *http://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/340/*
- Evidence from Elsewhere: Gathering, analysing and using other people's evidence *http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/395/*


## Acknowledgements

This guide was written by the Knowledge Translation Network (KTN), which is a working group carrying out a range of activities to support third sector evidence use.

### The KTN is made up of the following members:

- **Pippa Coutts** (Carnegie UK Trust) – co-author
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- **Andrew Paterson** (Community Health Exchange) – lead author
- **Cassy Rutherford** (The Robertson Trust)

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- **Celeste Berteau** (Life Changes Trust)
- **Louise Bowen** (The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services)
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Thanks to those who contributed case studies and who provided feedback on the guide as it was being developed.

# Part 1:

## What are we talking about?

# **Part 1:**
# What are we talking about?

To start with, here are some examples. The column on the right pinpoints where communities have been engaged in planning, gathering, analysing and using evidence, as well as how strong this engagement has been. Confused? Have a look at the table on the next page.

## Communities **design** and **make use** of evidence

A disabled people's organisation identifies a need to find out what sort of barriers they face when using services and how these can be overcome. They successfully apply for funding to pay for a researcher to collect and present evidence in order to improve access. **They work closely with the researcher** to decide what the research should look at, what methods should be used and the intended audience. The researcher collects and puts together the evidence in a report which the disabled people's organisation **uses to campaign for service improvements**.

**Medium engagement in planning evidence**

**Greater engagement in using evidence**

## Communities **gather** the evidence

Researchers conducting a study on how young people self-manage diabetes set up a research steering group consisting of young people with diabetes. The group helps to plan the research, and develops some methods for gathering evidence in which **young people create photo and video diaries** of how they manage their condition. The steering group also **advises the project on its findings as they emerge** and how to publish these in an engaging format.

**Greater engagement in gathering evidence**

**Medium engagement in analysing evidence**

## Communities **lead** on every aspect of evidence

An urban community development trust wants its activities to better-reflect the priorities of the wider community and, at the same time, increase community support and awareness around its work. The trust begins a community action planning process, involving setting up a community-steering group, events with residents and local agencies and a community survey. **The steering group brings the evidence together in the plan**, showing the need for more joint activities for older and younger people. It also highlights community support for the trust to provide these. Using the plan, the trust successfully applies for funding to run workshops on using social media in which people of different ages share experiences and get to know one another.

**Greater engagement in analysing evidence**

## Communities **shape** what is considered as evidence

Local residents tell researchers they feel stigmatised by research data about their neighbourhood. People working to support people in the neighbourhood also report this. adding that people often disagree with the data about their community. Recognising the mismatch between research findings and people's experiences, the researchers, practitioners and community members begin **working together** on how to get evidence that better reflects the experiences and perspectives of residents.

**Medium engagement in planning (and shaping) evidence**

These examples give an indication of how communities can engage with evidence.

**They show that communities can have a role in, and even take a lead in:**

- deciding what evidence is needed and how it will be found;
- gathering the evidence;
- analysing and interpreting what is found;
- using the evidence; and
- shaping what is considered as evidence.

The table below shows how communities can engage with evidence to a lesser or greater extent at different stages of an 'evidence process'.

**Different levels and stages of engagement with evidence (inspired by model developed by Carnegie UK Trust – Coutts, P (2019) The many shades of co-produced evidence, p9)**
*https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/the-many-shades-of-co-produced-evidence/*

| | Lesser engagement | Medium engagement | Greater engagement |
|---|---|---|---|
| PLAN | Agencies or professional researchers decide what evidence is required and design process for finding it. Communities may be consulted on their priorities. | Researchers and community plan activities together, with the community having a say over what evidence is required, how it will be gathered and how it will be presented. | Community decides what evidence it wants, how to get it and who the audience is they are trying to reach. |
| GATHER | Traditional process of surveying, consulting or interviewing community members. | Methods in which community members have an active role such as video diaries and story dialogue. | Community takes the lead in gathering evidence from different sources. |
| ANALYSE | Analysis of data by professionals, usually at a desk or on a computer. | Workshops with the community to analyse data and check themes as they develop. | Community generates themes from data and comes up with findings from the evidence. |
| USE | Professional researchers use the evidence to write a report or agencies use it to develop a plan. | Evidence is fed back to the community. | Community uses evidence in its own activities or to influence planning and decisions. |

# Definitions

So, what do we mean by communities engaging with evidence? It may help to define the key terms…

### Community

As shown in the first two examples above, a community can be a group of people who share a characteristic such as being disabled, being of a similar age or having a health condition. Of course, a community can also be made up of people who live in the same place, as is the case in the final example.

*The National Standards for Community Engagement* define community as "a group of people united by at least one common characteristic, including geography, identity or shared interests."

We often use the term 'community group' in this guide. This means an organised group of people from a community, who have come together to do something for the benefit of the wider community. A community group can be informal or it can be set up with a formal constitution and as a registered charity.

### Evidence

When people talk about evidence they tend to have at least some of the following in mind:

- Statistical data – the numbers.
- Written and spoken stories.
- Photographs and video.
- Records and national surveys.
- The knowledge and experience of paid workers, volunteers, service users and community members.
- Evaluations – measuring how well something is working.

There are many more types of evidence than this but, for now, it is worth asking what makes these different things count as evidence.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* definition of evidence is 'the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief of proposition is valid or true.' This description of evidence is useful because people often have different understandings of what evidence is, or what counts as good evidence.

One view is that evidence should be 'objective' and not based on personal beliefs or feelings. Academic evidence is often seen as being objective in this way. But people's knowledge and experience is also a valuable source of evidence.

What counts as evidence will depend on what we want to do or find out.

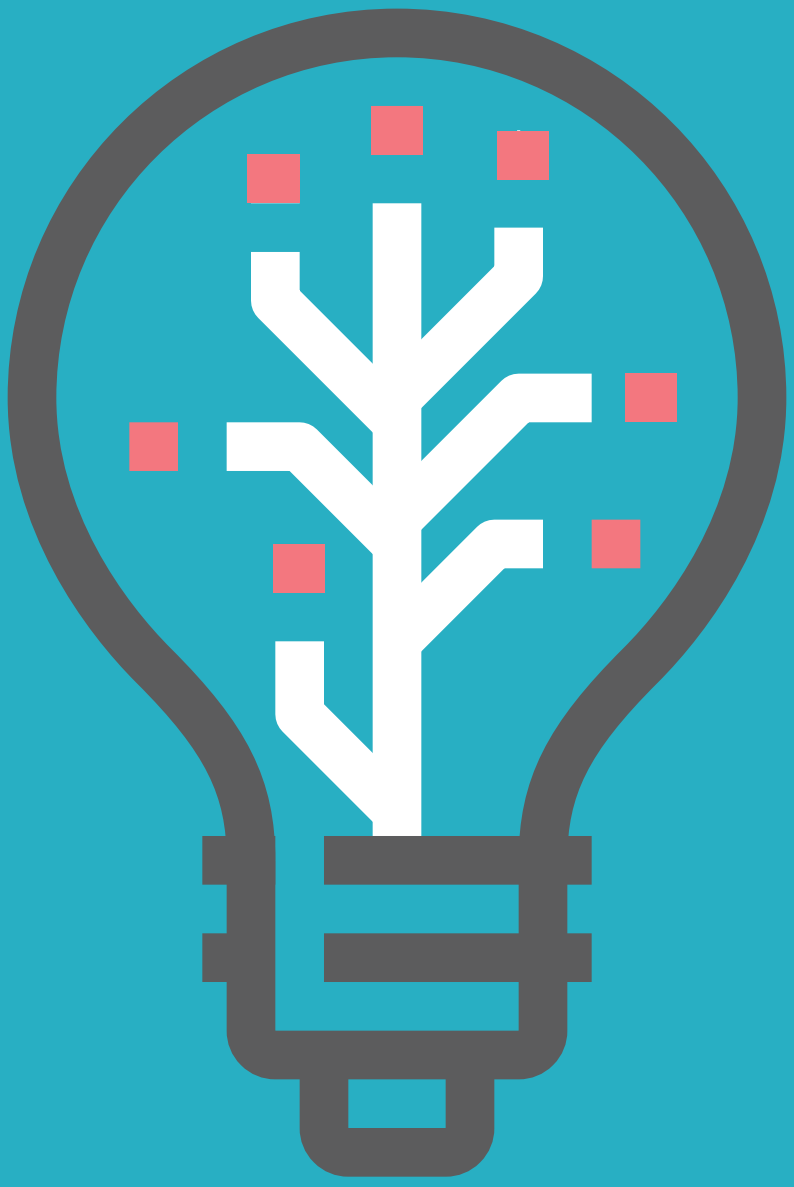
The Knowledge Translation Network's *Evidence for Success* guide gives some hints and tips on accessing and using evidence that suits your needs.

**Engagement**

By 'engagement' we mean that communities are not only involved in evidence but are part of shaping it. This relates to the point above that there are different understandings of what evidence is. What we mean by evidence is continually shaped by the communities and societies in which we live. In this regard, evidence is there to be contested by a community in the same way that other things are, such as political decisions that affect the community. So, instead of thinking of evidence as independently existing 'out there' to be gathered and used, we are making the case that communities can, and do, actively influence what evidence is as part of their wider work to make change happen.

# Part 2:

## Why are communities engaging with evidence?



# Part 2:
# Why are communities engaging with evidence?

A range of recent developments in Scotland have been encouraging communities to engage with evidence. They range from community groups themselves to government policies that create opportunities for communities to have more influence in shaping local services.

## The heat from below – Scotland's community sector

Scotland has a strong, growing and innovative community sector, consisting of a lot of very different community groups and organisations. These range from informal groups to more formal organisations. They can be made up of people who live in the same neighbourhood or who share the same interests and identities. It is important to say that many of the policies and developments listed below would not mean much at all if it wasn't for Scotland's community-sector.

Information and support is already available for community groups and anyone wanting to know more about community groups in Scotland. A good umbrella body for the sector is the *Scottish Community Alliance*. The *Communities Channel Scotland website* provides stories about, and resources for, community groups in Scotland.

## Policy

How is the world of government policy relevant to community groups working at a local level and what does this have to do with evidence? Well, in 2011, the *Christie Commission* on the future delivery of public services produced its report for the Scottish Government.

**It came up with the following recommendations for how public services are planned and delivered:**

- Stronger **partnership** working between organisations that are responsible for public services.
- Increased **participation** of people who use or are affected by public services in their design and delivery.
- A focus on **preventing** problems before they arise.

Since then, a range of policy developments in Scotland have created opportunities for community groups to contribute to how decisions are made and how public services are planned and delivered. Some of these opportunities require communities to engage with evidence.

For instance, in order to take over publicly-owned land or buildings under the *Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015)*, a community group must show evidence about the support they have from their community.

Community groups can also use the Act to start conversations with public bodies about improving services. A range of evidence will be helpful for groups to contribute their ideas to the process, including the knowledge and experience of people who use services.

There is also a role for community groups in planning processes. This includes planning for places, communities, health and social care, community justice and services for children and young people. You can find out more about these plans in the **appendix**. They all create opportunities for communities to engage with evidence in order to inform local plans.

## Funders

Funding bodies have also had a role in encouraging communities to engage with evidence. Many funders are shifting towards funding projects that put people at the heart of how they are planned and carried out. Funding proposals which involve service users and communities in identifying needs and drafting bids may be more likely to be funded.

Some funders are showing an interest in funding projects in which communities engage with evidence. An example is *Knowledge is Power*, a partnership between Scottish Community Development Centre and the Poverty Alliance which is supporting community groups to conduct their own community-led action research **(see more on this in section 3)**.

For more on funding visit Communities Channel Scotland's *funding page* for community groups.

# Part 3:

## How do communities engage with evidence?

# Part 3:
# How do communities engage with evidence?

Communities can engage with evidence in a range of different ways. This section seeks to list the main approaches in one place, while signposting you to where you can find out more.

For each approach we have tried to indicate when and why you might want to use it. Whichever approach you take, our general advice is to ask:

**1.** Why do you (the community) want to engage with evidence?

**2.** How do you (the community) want to engage with evidence?

## Co-production of evidence

**Medium engagement in planning, gathering, analysing and/or using evidence.**

**What is it?**

Co-production happens when the people and organisations who provide services and projects and the people who use services work closely together to design and deliver services. It involves understanding and making use of each other's strengths. Co-production shifts the power away from the existing service providers towards those who use them.

Interest in the co-production has increased over the last decade. The co-production of evidence has been discussed less, but for evidence to be co-produced the process should be based on the same principles as service co-production.

**That is:**

- People with different perspectives are involved in the process.
- Support is given to these people so they can be meaningfully involved in the process.
- Researchers are one of a number of different partners in the process. They respect the knowledge of others.
- Everyone benefits from working together.

Carnegie UK Trust's report, *The many shades of co-produced evidence*, introduces co-production of evidence and its challenges, such as having the available time and resources. It suggests that delivering the whole process of co-producing evidence may be too much for many researchers, organisations and other partners. It outlines a five-stage approach to co-producing evidence and suggests that co-production of evidence could, at first, focus on those stages where working together will be more productive.

**Why use it?**

Potential benefits of co-producing evidence include:

- making evidence accessible to evidence users, including community organisations and individuals who are affected by the topic being researched;
- making evidence more closely reflect what matters to people and communities;
- making evidence more directly relevant to policy and practice.

**Find out more**

- Read the Carnegie UK Trust's The many shades of co-produced evidence at *https://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/the many-shades-of-co-produced-evidence*
- Find out more about co-production at *http://coproductionscotland.org.uk/* and at *https://info.copronet.wales/*
- Section 4 of this guide includes a case study of the Match Me project in which evidence was co-produced by disabled people.

## Place-based approaches

**Medium engagement in planning and gathering evidence.**

**What is it?**

Place-based approaches focus on a neighbourhood and involve organisations working in partnership with each other as well as with local people. A place-based approach looks for the things that connect people, such as where the community is seen to begin and end, and land or buildings that people recognise or value. The approach also involves asking people what their priorities are and agreeing on how to achieve these.

**Why use it?**

Place-based approaches are likely to be used in the different types of planning introduced in section two and in the appendix (e.g. community planning and local place plans). This work can be agency-led but is more effective if communities are supported to take a lead, possibly through

community-led action plans which set out local priorities and information about the community. See more on community-led action planning below.

**Find out more**

More on place-based approaches can be found at:

- Resources on place-based approaches can be found on What Works Scotland's website *http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/topics/placebased-approaches/*
- Scotland's Place Principle has been developed by the Scottish Government and COSLA with a range of other organisations to support place-based work. *https://www.gov.scot/publications/place-principle-introduction/*

## Community-led Action Planning

**Greater engagement in planning, gathering, analysing and using evidence.**

**What is it?**

Community-led action planning involves working with local people to identify priorities and gather information with a view to setting out what will happen next. It gives people an opportunity to start with what's important to them and set out what they think needs to happen to make sure that their communities are better places to live.

**Why use it?**

Community organisations working for the benefit of their community can use this approach to establish what is important to community members and how this can be taken forward. A community-led action plan will also help to make a case to funders or public bodies as to why they should get behind a proposal. For both these reasons, a community-led action plan can be a helpful step in taking forward activities such as regenerating a high street or taking over land and buildings.

**Find out more**

- SCDC developed an online toolkit for Argyll and Bute Council to help groups get started on community-led action planning. *https://www.communitytoolkit.net/*
- Section 4 of this guide contains a case study of Alva's community action plan, which illustrates how the approach works in practice.

## Community-led action research

**Greater engagement in planning, gathering, analysing and using evidence.**

### What is it?

Community-led action research is a way of doing research where the issue to be researched, the way the research is carried out and how the research results are used is decided by the community. This makes community-led action research different from traditional research which tends to be conducted on the community by researchers from outside the community.

### Why use it?

The aim of community-led action research is to make a difference to the problems or issues that affect people's lives. It is more likely that this aim will be achieved if the people who directly experience these issues have a big part in identifying, researching and addressing them.

Community-led action research can enable a community organisation or group to engage with evidence around an issue in their community while building skills and community ties at the same time.

**Find out more**

SCDC's Knowledge is Power programme will be supporting community groups to carry out community-led action research. The website also provides a straightforward introduction to what community-led action research. *https://www.knowledgeispower.scot/*

## Citizens' panel

**Medium engagement in gathering evidence.**

### What is it?

Citizens' panels are a way to consult on people's priorities. Typically, members of a citizens' panel are selected at random in a similar way to how people are selected for jury service. Participants are then consulted on their priorities through surveys, focus groups and workshops. Citizens' panels can consist of more than 1000 people, who may be involved over a number of such consultations and workshops.

### Why use it?

Government and public service providers such as local authorities have used citizens' panels to help to inform decisions and planning around important issues in society.

**Find out more**

- An introduction to citizens' panels is provided by Involve at *https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/citizens-panel.*
- See the case study Midlothian Citizens' Panel in section 4 of this guide for a practical example of one being used.

## Participatory Appraisal

**Medium engagement in gathering, analysing and using evidence.**

**What is it?**

Participatory appraisal (PA) groups together a range of tools for people to identify their own priorities and other information about their community. It often involves visual methods such as photography and drawing, which can be more accessible and engaging than traditional forms of gathering evidence such as surveys.

**Why use it?**

PA is useful for producing evidence that reflects the interests and priorities of the community. It can be used as part of a wider community-led action research project.

**Find out more**

- A good online source of information on PA is provided by Involve *https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods/participatory-appraisal*

# Other tools

A range of methods can be used as part of the approaches described above. More traditional tools for gathering and using evidence such as questionnaires, focus groups and report writing should be considered (and these can be used creatively). However, we've listed a few tools which may be less well known and involve greater engagement with evidence by communities.

- **Community Asset Mapping** – A way for communities to identify land, buildings and services that are important to them.
  *https://mycommunity.org.uk/help-centre/resources/landand-building-assets/map-assets-community/*

- **Place Standard** – Developed by NHS Health Scotland, Architecture and Design Scotland and the Scottish Government, the Place Standard is a tool that can help people working in and with communities to think about the physical elements of a place (e.g. its buildings, spaces, and transport links) as well as the social aspects (e.g. whether people feel they have a say in decision making). The tool provides prompts for discussions, allowing people to consider all the aspects of a place in a planned way. The Place Standard can be a useful way to involve local people in gathering information about their community in order to work towards positive change.
  *https://www.placestandard.scot/*

- **Story dialogue** – A structured process that enables valuable personal experiences to draw out important themes and issues in the community. Actions can be planned around these insights. A brief introduction and guide to story dialogue is provided in SCDC's Action Research in the Community (ARC) guide.
  *https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/community-led-action-research/arc*

- **Using drawings, photos and audio/visual recordings** – These methods can make gathering evidence more engaging and accessible. These tools can also be used to find more creative ways to reflect on and present evidence. Again, ARC provides some introductions to these.
  *https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/community-led-action-research/arc*

- **Why bother Involving people in evaluation? Beyond feedback** – This workbook from Evaluation Support Scotland can help you plan why, when and how to involve the people you work with in evaluation. The workbook is an editable PDF document which you can fill in, save, edit, share with your colleagues, and print.
  *http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/297/*

- **National Performance Framework** – This contains the Scottish Government's 11 National Outcomes, a set of broad ambitions around making Scotland better for everyone who lives here. The outcomes and the indicators, which sit underneath them, can be usefulfor community organisations to measure their impact against, given that they are aspired to at a national level.
  *https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/*

- **National Standards for Public Involvement in Research** - These UK-wide standards provide a framework for reflecting on and improving the purpose, quality and consistency of public involvement in research. They can also be used by members of the public and community groups to assess and improve the extent of their involvement in a research project.
  *https://sites.google.com/nihr.ac.uk/pi-standards/home?authuser=0*

## Other sources of useful information

- The Knowledge Translation Network's Evidence for Success series of resources (of which this resource is one) is a great place to start for community organisations seeking to know more about all things 'evidence'.
  *www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/our-work-partners/knowledge-translation-network/*

- Communities Channel Scotland contains resources to help community organisations to know their community and show their impact.
  *http://www.communityscot.org.uk*

- Evaluation Support Scotland has a wealth ofpractical guides and resources around evaluation.
  *http://www.evaluationsupport scotland.org.uk/resources/*

# Part 4:

## Case studies

# Match Me – 'What works' for adapted social housing lettings

The Match Me study sought to understand the process of applying for and moving into social rented housing, from the perspectives of disabled people, as well as housing providers. The study was funded by DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning). It was conducted by the University of Stirling, in partnership with Housing Options Scotland and Horizon Housing Association. This disabled-led research involved a lead researcher, peer researchers and advisory group members who all identified as being disabled.

## How the evidence was generated

Qualitative interviews were carried out with disabled home-seekers and tenants, as well as with housing and occupational therapy professionals. Three self-identifying disabled Peer Researchers (two with mobility impairments and one with a visual impairment) were recruited and supported to contribute significantly to data collection. **Peer researchers helped interview the 28 disabled social housing applicants/new tenant households.** Data collection also included discussions on lettings practice in the local authorities with representatives from housing and social work/occupational therapy staff. A total of 60 participants attended local feedback sessions, including peer researchers, service providers, tenant representatives and local organisations involved with disabled people's housing issues. Interviews and discussions were digitally recorded for subsequent analysis.

**Greater engagement in gathering evidence.**

## How the evidence was used

**The action research approach enabled discussion of emerging findings with the disabled-led Project Advisory Group and through the local feedback sessions, in order to ensure the maximum degree of co-production of research findings and recommendations.**

**Medium engagement in analysing evidence.**

The report, published in August 2019, made 13 recommendations for local authorities, registered social landlords, Scottish Government and the Scottish Housing Regulator. Initial presentations of findings were made to the research funders, DRILL, and to the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations in June 2019. The research team then developed a detailed programme for dissemination and impact from August 2019, including a press launch, presentations to a wide range of government, housing and disabled sector agencies. Monitoring of impact will be ongoing to document and further support improvements in lettings practice to benefit disabled people.

## Benefits/challenges

Reflections on involvement from participants indicated a broad consensus on the benefits of a co-coproduction approach. Some participants reported an increase in knowledge, self-confidence, and skills which contributed to their personal development. Challenges for effective co-production included ensuring enough time and resources for effective participation. Some participants may need support to maintain motivation throughout a lengthy project period. Practical challenges for disabled researchers included the inaccessibility and lack of public transport, as well as the inaccessibility of interviewees' homes. For disabled peer researchers in receipt of benefits, the social security system did not easily enable short-term involvement in research. The passion and commitment demonstrated by many of the Match Me co-coproduction participants made a huge contribution to the study and added to learning for future research design.

**Study details:**

Anderson, I., Theakstone, D., Lawrence, J. and Pemble, C. (2019) Match Me – What works for adapted social housing lettings? Action research to enhance independent living for disabled people. Edinburgh: Housing Options Scotland.

Available online at: *https://www.housingoptionsscotland.org.uk/2019/08/inappropriate-housing-causing-disabled-people-physical-mental-harm/*

# Setting priority actions for community planning - Midlothian Citizens' Panel

Midlothian Community Planning Partnership (CCP) uses a citizen's panel of 1000 residents to gather views twice a year. The winter survey covers experience of services provided by any partner in the CPP. The summer panel presents basic evidence to residents and asks for their views about proposed priorities for action by the CPP in the coming year. This is then used to inform decision making at an annual CPP stakeholders planning day and afterwards in writing the Local Outcome Improvement Plan. As the panel is a balanced sample population drawn together by a market research company using the voters' role (16 year olds upwards), a separate children and young people's version of the summer questionnaire was developed last year and completed by 500 young people from a variety of settings including Midlothian youth platform, the care experienced young people's Champions Group, pupil councils and piloted in 2 primary schools with pupils, as part of their curriculum.

## How the evidence was generated

The evidence for the summer survey is drawn from the annual statistical profile of Midlothian created by the CPP, and a strategic assessment that follows this using a Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal and Environmental (PESTLE) model to identify proposed priorities. **Panel members are asked to consider a summary of this against their own experience of issues they face as residents, before ranking priorities and adding what they feel has been missed.**

**Medium engagement in gathering evidence.**

## How the evidence was used

**The results are summarised by the research company and presented to an annual development day audience of approximately 130 stakeholders from across the public, third and private sector as part of a deliberative debate process. This sets the priority actions for the next year.** The outcomes for the project are reviewed every three years.

**Medium engagement in using evidence.**

## Benefits/challenges

Providing adequate evidence in a small space that is written in an accessible format is a challenge, people will give views on issues that they have no direct experience of. It is important to note that this is simply one part of a wider engagement process of neighbourhood planning, participatory budgeting, community asset transfers, participation requests and service user joint planning and customer satisfaction work that is also being undertaken.

### Find out more

- Midlothian Council's website contains a webpage on the Citizens' Panel containing further information on the process.
  *https://www.midlothian.gov.uk/info/200284/your_community/483/citizens_panel*

# Community evidence to support a participation request - Families into Sport for Health (FiSH)

**Families into Sport for Health (FiSH)** is a community group working towards better access to sport and leisure facilities in the Western Isles by illustrating the demand to prioritise a change in attitudes toward health. At the moment in Lewis and Harris, indoor sports facilities are unavailable on Sundays. The aim of this group is to represent the diverse and changing needs of the community and to focus on bettering the health of island residents through improved access to weekend facilities for all.

In 2017,the group successfully submitted a participation request to Western Isles Council around "improved and equitable access to recreational facilities for the health and wellbeing of families, especially children." Essentially the group are using a participation request to further their campaign to pilot Sunday opening hours of a local sports centre.

## How the evidence was generated

In their request, the group referred to a **community survey** they had been asked to carry out by the council in 2015. The survey interviewed 659 people who used the sports centre about opening hours. Not only did the survey show significant support for Sunday opening, but it suggested that service uptake would likely increase as a result, particularly among those aged between 25 and 44. On top of the survey, FiSH used their large and diverse membership to show how much community support their campaign has. The group also pointed to the popularity of family-oriented activities on Sundays in Lewis and Harris.

**Greater engagement in gathering evidence.**

## How the evidence was used

**FiSH cited this evidence in their participation request form.** The evidence helped FiSH to justify the outcome they wanted improved. It was also useful in other parts of the form, including sections on why the group should participate and what knowledge and experience they bring.

**Greater engagement in using evidence.**

## Benefits/challenges

The participation request was agreed and led to FiSH meeting with the Community Planning Partnership and being invited to give feedback on the Outer Hebrides Physical Activity Strategy. The group feels the participation request has progressed their campaign as part of their wider efforts.

## Find out more

- The participation request decision notice by Western Isles Council *https://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/news/2018/february/cpr-decision-notice-fish/*

# Using a community action plan to facilitate community asset transfer in Alva

Although community councils are not legally able to own assets such as land and buildings, community councils can take actions with a view to facilitating community ownership of local public assets. An example is provided by Alva Community Council (ACC) who, in 2015, developed Alva Community Action Plan, which helped to establish an asset transfer as a community priority. This eventually led to the Community Asset Transfer of the Cochrane Hall, a key community venue and hub in Alva, from Clackmannanshire Council to Alva Development Trust.

## How the evidence was generated

**In 2014, ACC started holding community meetings to gather views and began preparing a community action plan. A steering group was formed to oversee the development of the plan consisting of community council members as well as members of the wider community.** In 2015, the group delivered a short survey to every property in Alva, also making it available online.

**Greater engagement in planning evidence.**

240 people responded to the survey, **with responses categorized using a spreadsheet and themes highlighted based on the most common response to each question.** *Alva Community Action Plan* was published later that year, showing that the top priorities were around the need for a multi-purpose community facility and the upkeep of buildings in the town centre.

**Greater engagement in analysing evidence.**

## How the evidence was used

The findings of Alva Community Action Plan proved useful in 2018, when Clackmannanshire Council proposed the closure of Cochrane Hall along with a number of other local community facilities. This led to more community members joining the steering group and getting behind the setting up of a development trust to explore taking over Cochrane Hall.

## Benefits/challenges

Within a few months, and after a series of meetings with council officers and support from Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface and Community Ownership Support Service the development trust had signed a three-year lease for the building. The trust plans to finalise the asset transfer of Cochrane Hall within three years using provisions in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015). They hope to make the hall into a community hub for Alva, and are developing links with a range of agencies and community organisations with a view to them locating their services in the hub.

### Find out more

- Alva Community Action Plan can be found at *http://www.alvacommunitycouncil.org.uk/alva-community-action-plan/*
- This illustration was adapted from one contained in Strengthening Community Councils, by SCDC and What Works Scotland *https://www.scdc.org.uk/what/strengthening-communitycouncils*

# Appendix

# **Appendix:** Key policy developments relevant to communities engaging with evidence

### The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (2015)

The *Community Empowerment Act* aims to strengthen the voice of communities in decisions about public services and to make it easier for community groups to own and manage land and buildings.

Community groups can use the Act to make an asset transfer request to take over publicly-owned land or buildings. As part of an asset transfer request, groups must evidence the support they have from the community they represent. The *guidance* for making asset transfer requests lists community surveys and votes taken at a public meeting as options for evidencing community support

**Participation requests** are a way for community groups to start a conversation with public organisations about improving services. A range of evidence will be helpful for groups to make a successful request and to contribute ideas for improving services.

The Community Empowerment Act also makes changes to how community planning works. One area that the Act strengthens is the involvement of community organisations in community planning. Community Planning Partnerships must involve local community organisations in the development of local plans. This is likely to involve identifying priorities with communities and agreeing what actions need to be taken by different partners. In some local authority areas, such as *East Ayrshire*, community planning partnerships are supporting the development of community-led action plans (see part 3) as part of their wider community engagement.

**Find out more**

- See the *Policy Low-Down* section of Communities Channel Scotland for a run through of the Act and where to find further information and support.
- Two of the case studies in section 4 of this resource (Alva Community Action Plan and Families into Sport and Health) show how community groups have engaged with evidence in order to take up opportunities contained in the Community Empowerment Act.

### Local Place Plans

Whereas community planning focuses on how services are delivered locally, spatial planning is about how the built environment is planned and developed. *The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019* makes changes to how spatial planning is carried out in Scotland. It outlines a new way for communities to feed into the planning system called local place plans (LPPs). LPPs will be prepared by communities – this is an area where community organisations will need to consider how to work with their communities to identify local priorities for development.

**Find out more**

See a dedicated page on *planning reform* on Communities Channel Scotland.

### Children's Services Plans

Children's Services Plans are normally produced by health and social care partnerships. The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 specified that these plans must set out how children's services will most effectively safeguard, support and promote children's wellbeing over a three-year period.

Voluntary and community organisations that represent the interests of children and young people should be consulted as part of the preparation of this plan. The Act does not call for direct engagement with children and young people. However, many voluntary and community organisations in this field will want to involve children and young people in generating evidence to inform Children's Services Plans.

**Find out more**

See the *Policy Low-Down* section on Communities Channel Scotland for more on Children's Services Plans.

### Localities (Health and Social Care)

The Public Bodies (Joint Working) (Scotland) Act 2014 requires health boards and local authorities to integrate a range of health and social care services. Under this legislation, health and social care partnerships are required to involve service users and carers in the planning of local services. Often, voluntary and community organisations will represent these interests on health and social care structures. Many will involve their members in identifying priorities for improving services.

**Find out more**

Community Health Exchange (CHEX) has produced a *guide* for community groups who want to influence the new health and social care structures. CHEX's *case study* of Active Communities role in Renfrewshire Health and Social Care Partnership may also be useful.

### Community Justice Plans

Under section 17 of the *Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016*, local Community Justice Partnerships (consisting of agencies and services with a role in community justice) must produce a Community Justice Outcomes Improvement Plan. Relevant community and voluntary organisations must be supported to participate in the development of this plan. Involving communities, including people who have been through the criminal justice system, will be an integral part of this.

**Find out more**

See the *Policy Low-Down* section on Communities Channel Scotland for more on Community Justice Plans.

### Independent Care Review

The Scottish Government launched this *review* in 2017 to look at the care system for young people and children in Scotland. Through initiatives such as *1000 Voices*, the review is listening to young people's experiences of care, as well as those of their families and carers. The review also wants to hear from organisations working with and for children and families. It will provide the Scottish Government with recommendations on how to improve care.

**Find out more**

For more information visit the 1000 Voices *website*. You can also email *1000voices@whocaresscotland.org* or call 0141 226 4441 and ask to speak to a member of the 1000 Voices team.

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