

CHAIRING COMMUNITY FIRST PANELS:

Introduction

In my experience Chairing a Community First panel involves a wide range of skills. It is a bit like running a micro-business, while managing key relationships, meeting deadlines, analysing funding bids and co-ordinating processes leading to decisions affecting volunteers, local non-profit organisations and the community at large.

I was also struck by Alison Seabrooke's comments late in 2012, about the potential for the programme to deliver real change locally. Writing as the chief executive of The Community Development Foundation (central Government's delivery partner) Alison hoped that Community First panels would be 'seen as a model' for involving local people in decisions on how money is spent in their area.

I am very grateful to volunteer panel members, councillors, Community Engagement plus Safeguarding officials, Voluntary Action Waltham Forest and 2012-13 funded projects for their efforts to learn about Community First from scratch, make the model work, and produce great results for the ward in the process.

The following comments are written from the perspective of a panel chair whose goal was 'supporting and empowering the community by allocating Community First funding to projects in line with local priorities, in a fair and timely way'. There are a few checklist questions to answer as well.

Good Luck in your role as Chair! - Roger Dennison - Hoe Street First panel chair 2012/13.

NB Views expressed are the author's own. The material presented here is for your / your panel's information. You will know the scope of your work and the specific technical, or other, advice you need to obtain. The author is not liable for any loss resulting from groups, or individuals, viewing or acting on this material.

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Goal Setting

1. Welcome to the first in a series of information sheets offering a view on Community First Panel leadership.
2. Goals are central to Community First panel success (and I think they are valuable in life generally). They are a great incentive to keep going. Does the panel have a clearly expressed goal? Do You? Have individual panel members written down, precisely, what actions they are contributing over time to deliver that goal?
3. Initially a panel goal might be expressed as 'supporting and empowering the community by allocating funding to projects in line with local priorities, in a fair and timely way'. If so, it becomes possible to write down and share the plan for delivering that outcome. Members' goals contribute to the panel goal.
4. In the plan for a fictional panel its volunteers - Mr A, Ms B, and Mrs C – have signed up to be responsible for specific panel activities for the next 12 weeks. Those activities advance the panel's plan and help deliver the panel's next milestone.
5. Clarity over what the panel's work for the next 12 weeks means it will be easier for the chair to see: the right actions are being taken; timely progress is being made; and appropriate support is offered to volunteers along the way.
6. Finally, the chair can assess whether the panel's goal is going to be helped by maintaining the status quo (in which volunteers stay in 'their' role), or whether it is necessary to encourage volunteers to change roles, in 12 weeks' time.

Your Checklist

- Where is your panel's goal written down and how is it shared with members?
- How does your personal volunteering goal join up to the panel's goal?
- Where is your supportive energy coming from, to help you deliver your results?
- How will you know, in 6 weeks' time, that your volunteer colleagues are making appropriate progress?
- How will you provide panel members Mr A, Ms B, and Mrs C with constructive feedback on their contribution and how will you celebrate the panel's success?