Main Findings

- Although only a relatively small proportion of SIPs have experience of running a People’s Jury, those who have generally found it to be an effective way of engaging people in the decision making process. Juries also appear to have been an effective way of engaging young people who might not have become involved in more traditional methods of community engagement.

- Those involved in organising People’s Juries in SIPs reported that it was a very resource intensive form of consultation, particularly if efforts were made to encourage ‘hard to reach’ groups to participate. Many also suggested that this meant it was a technique that had to be used sparingly.

- The choice of topic or question to be addressed by a jury emerged as crucial in determining the extent to which the jury’s findings could be implemented. The research suggests that a jury is more likely to produce recommendations that can be implemented if it is asked to address a specific topic or question rather than a more general issue.

- While a minority of SIPs have made effective use of their People’s Panel, the majority of SIPs’ panels have been used far less extensively than was anticipated when they were established. Many SIPs were not able to devote sufficient resources to managing their panel and this appears to have been one of the main reasons for their limited use.

- Most SIPs which established a panel used it primarily as a research tool rather than as a mechanism for promoting greater community engagement. Only a few SIPs engaged panel members in more participative forms of involvement such as focus groups or discussion forums.

- Interviews with panel members revealed that they were disappointed that they had not been consulted more often and in a more participative manner. The research found little evidence of ‘consultation fatigue’, although there was some evidence of ‘consultation cynicism’. The research suggests that this could be overcome by giving more thought to managing the expectations of participants in panels and in providing them with feedback about any subsequent action taken.

- Panel members who participated in the research suggested that panels can be a good way of engaging some ‘hard to reach’ groups in the community such as older people, the housebound and people with caring responsibilities. They also noted that panels may, however, exclude other groups such as people with visual impairments, people with literacy problems and homeless people.

- The research suggests that panels have had a limited and indirect impact on decision making. It would appear that they have had more impact on decision making in relation to the activities of SIPs themselves than on issues which would need to be addressed by partner agencies.
Introduction and Research Methods

In August 1999, the Minister for Communities announced that resources of over £1 Million would be made available under the Listening to Communities Initiative to develop People’s Panels and People’s Juries in Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs).

All 34 area-based SIPs were offered the opportunity to establish a People’s Panel and the Scottish Executive appointed consultants to recruit panels in those areas where the SIP chose to participate in this initiative. The Scottish Executive also appointed consultants to plan, deliver and evaluate two pilot People’s Juries in two SIPs. Following these pilots all other SIPs were offered the opportunity to establish People’s Juries.

The overall aim of this research was to examine how successful People’s Juries and People’s Panels were as mechanisms for increasing community involvement and input into local decision making.

The research comprised:-

- a review of existing literature relating to community engagement and the use of panels and juries in other contexts
- analysis of documentary evidence provided by SIPs and the Scottish Executive about the establishment and use of panels and juries
- a postal survey of all 48 SIPs (60% overall response rate)
- case studies in nine SIP areas with experience of operating panels and juries. These case studies involved interviews with key stakeholders and interviews/focus groups involving panel and jury members.

Peoples Juries generally involve between 10 and 16 citizens brought together to take part in informed debate on a particular issue. Trained moderators ensure that jurors have the opportunity to hear and question witnesses, call for additional information and produce a decision or series of recommendations. Typically the commissioning body is required to respond but is not necessarily duty bound to implement the recommendations.

People’s Panels comprise a representative cross-section of the population of an area who have agreed to be consulted on a range of different issues over a period of time. Panels can vary in size depending on the overall population of the area involved. Panel members can be consulted using a range of different techniques including completing surveys and participating in focus groups.

People’s Juries

The postal survey that formed part of this research identified seven SIPs that had organised a jury between 2000 and 2003. Five of these juries involved people of all ages, while the remaining two involved young people. The juries considered a wide range of topics including transport, drugs, education, facilities for young people, barriers to employment and community involvement.

Operating Juries

An important element of the jury process is that it gives jurors the opportunity to take evidence from witnesses and to question or ‘cross examine’ them. In theory, this should allow jurors to reach more informed judgements when considering what are often complex issues. The research suggests that in practice this depends on two factors

- the quality of the witnesses and
- the ability of jurors to cross-examine the witnesses.

Many jurors who were interviewed said that they thought the level of support they received was one of the key strengths of the jury process compared to other forms of consultation. They also said that they thought it resulted in more informed and more realistic recommendations than would have been possible without the support they received from the facilitators.

Engaging Communities

The research suggests that juries can be an effective way of involving people who would be unlikely to become involved in other forms of community engagement. However, many SIP staff who were interviewed during the research emphasised that juries had to be seen as only one of a range of different methods of engaging local communities. They felt that juries could be useful in particular circumstances but on other occasions different types of consultation would be more appropriate.

SIP staff members in those areas where youth juries have been organised felt that the jury model was a good way of involving young people who were unlikely to become engaged in more traditional methods of involvement. They said that young people seem to enjoy the fact that a jury is
a concentrated event which does not require a long term commitment. Staff members also felt that young people welcomed the opportunity to address issues which concerned them with their peers and present their views directly to senior decision makers.

Juries are a resource intensive way of securing community engagement, both in terms of finance and staff time and commitment. The research indicates that ensuring that people, including those who are traditionally ‘hard to reach’, are effectively engaged in the process requires considerable time to be devoted to planning and providing support to jury members. This suggests that juries should be used sparingly.

**Impact on Decision Making**

The choice of topic to be addressed by a jury appears to have a major influence on the ability of juries to influence decision makers. Some stakeholders, including SIP staff, said that for a jury to be influential the topic had to be one where agencies were open to being influenced. Others suggested that juries were more likely to be influential if they were addressing an issue where stakeholders were interested in hearing new ideas and open to suggestions about how the issue could be tackled.

Juries seem to have generally resulted in small, incremental changes that could be implemented relatively easily. Many of the changes simply consolidated or gave a fresh impetus to existing ideas rather than being major new initiatives. It also appears that recommendations made by juries were more likely to be taken forward if they could be implemented by the SIP itself, or by a single agency, rather than requiring partnership working.

**People’s Panels**

**Establishing Panels**

Although all 34 area based SIPS in Scotland were offered the opportunity to establish a People’s Panel a number of these SIPS declined the offer. Panels were eventually recruited in 24 area-based SIPS.

The recruitment process was initially conducted by postal survey. This generated a very low response rate in most of the participating SIP areas. Some SIP staff interviewed during the research said that postal recruitment may be unsuitable in SIP areas partly because of literacy problems amongst significant numbers of residents but also because of a suspicion amongst some residents of any communications perceived as coming from government agencies.

There appear to have been difficulties in some areas in recruiting young people to panels, particularly young men. In other areas there were difficulties in recruiting people in employment or people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

**Use of Panels by SIPS**

The research revealed that while 24 People’s Panels were recruited a small number of these panels were never used. Other SIPS have reported high attrition rates with large reductions in the number of active panel members over relatively short periods of time.

When panel members were originally recruited they were advised that they could expect to be contacted two or three times a year. The results of the research show that very few SIPS have contacted panel members more than once a year and nearly half of the SIPS who responded to the survey said that they had conducted only one or two surveys since the panel was first established.

Most SIPS have used panels to conduct postal surveys involving all panel members. These surveys have covered a range of different topics including crime and community safety, health, transport, education and training, childcare facilities, housing, environmental improvements, employment and leisure facilities. They have also been used to gather baseline data for performance monitoring purposes.

**Engaging Communities**

A few SIPS have attempted to use their panel as a basis for organising focus groups or other more participative forms of engagement. These appear to have been more effective when they are used to discuss topics that are likely to be of interest to a substantial number of panel members. The main reason given for focus groups being ineffective was that the topic was not ‘interesting enough’ to a broad section of panel members.

Panel members who participated in the research expressed their surprise and disappointment that they had not been contacted more frequently. While they understood that the main purpose of a panel was to provide a sample frame for conducting surveys they also expected to be involved in a more active way.

A number of panel members who participated in the research said they felt that panels were a better way of involving a broad range of people than existing community structures.
Others felt that as the panel was new it would not carry some of the historical associations of existing community organisations and would not be dominated by ‘the same old faces’.

The research revealed some evidence to suggest that panels were not always viewed positively by people involved in existing community organisations or by community representatives on SIPs. The general impression was that some community representatives thought that panels were useful research tools but that there were other more appropriate mechanisms for promoting community involvement.

**Impact on Decision Making**

It was difficult to identify many specific examples where there was a clear ‘cause and effect’ relationship between the feedback received from a panel and a specific decision made by a SIP.

However, it was possible to identify decisions where the findings of a panel survey had been ‘influential’ or had been one of a number of sources of information that had ‘contributed’ to a particular decision being taken. Examples of this type of influence included a reallocation of SIP funding to reflect the issues and priorities identified by panel members. The results of panel surveys have also helped to influence the development of various plans and strategies and funding bids.

Very few of the panel surveys conducted by SIPs appear to have been directly linked to the development of specific strategies or action plans. They were more likely to be used to gather general information about local residents’ behaviour, opinions and attitudes. As such they were perceived as being a useful way of informing the overall direction of the SIP rather than informing specific decisions.

Panel members who participated in the research were generally unable to identify any significant changes that had resulted from the various surveys they had completed. However, the research also suggests that panel members were often not aware of changes that had been made because they had received very little feedback on how the results of surveys had been used to inform decision making within the SIP.

**Conclusions**

The research findings suggest that panels and juries can be effective methods for promoting community engagement and participation if they are used appropriately. The findings also suggest some lessons that can be learned about the future use of panels and juries, not just by SIPs but by other organisations and partnerships.

**Juries** provide an opportunity for a small group drawn from either a geographical community or a community of interest to examine an issue or topic in an intensive manner that would not be possible with many other forms of community engagement. The research suggests that to be effective juries need to:

- Focus on a tightly defined topic or issue where key stakeholders are committed to taking on board and actively responding to the jury’s findings.
- Be well resourced with sufficient time and money allocated to support the jury process.
- Secure the full commitment of all participants including jurors, witnesses and stakeholders.
- Provide support for jurors to allow them to participate effectively in the process, particularly if they lack confidence or have limited experience of being involved in community activities.
- Be used flexibly and sparingly. There is no single blueprint for a successful jury and the process may need to be adapted to meet local circumstances.
- The resources required to properly support a jury also suggest that careful consideration needs to be given to ensuring that a jury is the most appropriate form of community engagement in particular circumstances.

**Panels** can be used as an effective method of engaging with a representative sample of a local community and gather information about their views, expectations and perceptions. The research suggests that to be effective panels need to:

- Be used appropriately. Careful consideration of how a panel will be used needs to be given in advance of it being established. This should be communicated clearly to prospective panel members so as not to raise false expectations.
- Have sufficient resources committed to recruiting panel members but even more importantly to managing and maintaining the panel once it is established.
- Be used to inform specific decisions or the development of particular initiatives as well as gathering general information about the views of panel members on particular issues.
Be used creatively. Panel members can be engaged in a range of different ways including surveys of sub groups and more participative methods of engagement such as focus groups.

Engage effectively with panel members by communicating with them regularly and providing feedback about how their views have been responded to.
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