



**Submission to the Public Consultation on  
The Review of the Public Participation Network User Guide**

**By**

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## **Introducing County Wicklow Public Participation Network**

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system.

Co Wicklow PPN has 300 diverse member groups, some of these groups are networks in their own right. PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Housing & Corporate Estate Strategic Policy Committee; Planning & Development Strategic Policy Committee; Transport, Water & Environment Strategic Policy Committee; Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee; Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee; Wicklow County Childcare Committee; Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee; Co Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Wicklow County Tourism Board; Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre, County Wicklow Partnership, and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee. PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector is prioritised within local policy processes.

## **Consultation on the Review of the Public Participation Network User Guide**

Co Wicklow PPN circulated the current PPN User Guide and information relating to the review to our member groups in early March. Following their suggestions and ideas a draft submission was circulated back to members and discussed at a Secretariat meeting prior to approval for the below submission.

### **General Observations**

The User Guide should be in the format of a "How To" guide so that stakeholders can "Dip In" to sections for guidance where necessary. Breaking it into clearer sections might make it more digestible. Could it contain a format to highlight (colour coding) what is particularly relevant to the various stakeholders e.g. local authority?

Put list of acronyms, explanation of terms at the beginning so people know what they are before they read the guide

Lead the guide with a Vision or an ideology that will encourage people to engage with the PPN in the first instance. Ensure that the ethos and practise of participation and inclusion can be seen throughout

Update the User Guide to reflect changes including:

- Changes in Department
- Changes/increase in funding (If it is thought necessary to retain this specific information)
- Inclusion of extra staff
- Statistics (in background)
- Wellbeing – to reflect the process that has been developed and now used
- To reflect current practises e.g. Linkage groups/Thematic networks
- Taking cognisance of Dept. Circulars e.g. Use of Salesforce, Elected Representatives
- Showing a clear understanding of all the PPN stakeholders, to include Department, Local Authority, Hosts, Secretariat, Members and Workers. These should include Terms of Reference for National Advisory Group, PPN Workers Network, National Secretariat Network and the process for electing representatives for and from these groups.
- Removing all references to interim practises

Adding a Governance Section would be useful. This section could include:

- Guidance in relation to PPNs and the Lobbying Authority, Charities Regulator, GDPR practices etc.
- Suggested Financial practises/procedures
- Templates including Service Level Agreement, Memorandum of Association, Constitution, Financial Policy, Code of Conduct, Grievance Procedures
- Guidance should also be provided for PPN Representatives who become company directors of the committees which they sit on the PPN's behalf

Language

- The use of terminology including : Plenary, Secretariat, College etc. has been reported as being a barrier in understanding PPNs. Using members/ members meeting, steering committee, sector etc. has been highlighted as being more comfortable and less threatening to community groups.
- Include the marine. Ensure that there is an understanding that environment includes waterways and coastal areas above and below the water line.

### **Specific Observations**

- Under Principles and Values of PPN (pgs. 4-5) – It is unhelpful to discuss variations to structure in this section, this should be laid out in the structure section.  
In regard to accountability, while this remains in the main part with member groups it should be recognised that there should also be some accountability to funders

- Pages 6-7 –This whole section should come under Membership of the PPN, with the piece currently titled “Membership of the PPN” renamed to “Criteria for Membership”. Clarity is needed if this section is seen to be a guidance or a requirement.

Current variations that impact on this section include the practise of allowing Full Membership & Associate Membership and what the criteria is for each. Is membership allowed for groups from outside of the PPNs remit? [Wicklow PPN allows associate membership for groups that have a base outside the county BUT have a definite member/client base within the county]

- Page 7 – Environmental – more clarity is needed in relation to groups having to register with IEN and why/how this is enforced
- Page 8 – Use of Salesforce – this should have its own heading and reflect the absolute requirement to use Salesforce as the PPN database. This section should also refer to benefits of use and the supports available. Linking in with Tricia and Bridget to write this piece might be helpful
- Page 8 – Structure of the PPNs- clear guidance is needed here in relation to the legal (company), hosted, local authority structure. What are the pros and cons and what are the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each structure in relation to the PPN

“The flat structure” also causes confusion. A clear definition of meaning is needed, to highlight that all members of the PPN are equal and have the right to contribute to the direction of the work of the PPN, as well as its governance, and be informed of developments. Guidance on how this can be achieved in Appendix 3 is useful.

Policies/Constitutions/Terms of Reference laying out clear procedures on how this should be done would also be useful

“The flat structure” in relation to the Secretariat is more challenging if the PPN is to operate in an efficient manner. A rotating facilitator is key but an extended period e.g. 6 months, would be more supportive for the Resource Worker and the PPN.

Clear Policy/Terms of Reference on this would be useful

- Page 9 – Secretariats - The piece on re-electing the Secretariat should be removed.  
Page 9 – Municipal District PPNs – this should be changed to Networks to promote a better understanding of PPNs

Page 9 – Linkage Groups – This section should reflect the current practise of Thematic Networks and should highlight that these structures form around areas of particular interest, showing relevance. Guidance on best practise in setting up and engagement would be useful

It should be clear that Linkage Groups/Thematic Networks do not always elect the PPN Representatives. In some cases this can be done through the Municipal District Networks or through the Plenary

- Page 11-12 – Activities of the PPN – Consider re-naming this along the lines of “the role of” or “functions of”.

A section that highlights the necessity and benefits of having PPN representation on a committee would be useful. In the case of the local authority this might include highlighting the policies that apply.

Out of pocket expenses is more an operations issue than a representative one and should be moved from this section

- Page 13 – Representative’s Charter – The Charter should also show the link between the PPN and the Representatives and vice versa and not just the linkage groups/thematic networks, representatives and committees. The PPN has a responsibility to the Reps and the Reps to the PPN.

Rather than have Appendix 6-8 an example of a Representatives Charter would be useful

- Page 13 – Information Sharing and Communication – this section should speak more strongly to the importance of Representative Feedback
- Page 14 – Budget & Workplan – Funding information needs to be removed or updated. It needs to be clear if the Department, as the main funder, has any stipulation on how funding should or should not be spent. Is there anything that funding cannot be allowed to cover?
- Page 14 – Resource Worker – clarity on line management needed, paying heed to legal responsibilities of either local authority, host or any legal structure
- Page 15 - Relationship with the local authority is key for a well - functioning PPN. Sections should also be included in relation to the relationship between PPNs and hosting companies and limited company structures (where they exist) showing key roles, responsibilities and distinctions.

PPN National Advisory Group – this piece needs to be updated. The Terms of Reference would be a useful addition.

- Appendices – These need to be reviewed in light of GDPR requirements particularly in relation to managing membership and Salesforce  
The Salesforce piece should be updated in collaboration with South Dublin Volunteer Centre

Co Wicklow PPN hopes that these observations and suggestions are useful and we look forward to receiving a draft of the new User Guide in the future