Consultation on Review of Public Participation Network User Guide.

Submitted by the Kerry Public Participation Network.

30th April 2019

Following on from a discussion with the Kerry Public Participation Network, they wish to highlight the following with regard to the PPN User Guide.


Introduction:

'Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government' identifies the need for Local Government to build strong relationships with and gain the interest of local people and to provide for better engagement with citizens.
The participation of citizens in public life and their right to influence the decisions that affect their lives and communities are at the centre of democracy. Open and inclusive policy-making increases public participation, enhances transparency and accountability, builds civic capacity and leads to increased buy-in and better decision-making. It is important that open and participatory systems are developed through an open and participatory engagement with interested parties. To this end all moves towards making decision-making more participative are useful and welcome. It is important to ensure that local people and other stakeholders are genuinely engaged in shaping the decisions that affect them. The proposals contained in this report are simply a step towards that goal". **Working Group Report on Citizen Engagement with Local Government 2014**

Everything , every facet and point contained within the Putting People First and the Working Group Report highlights the importance of citizen engagement and participation and being involved in the decision making at local level, in all this , it

must be stressed that this is being carried out by **Volunteers**, Volunteers who give up their time, energy and commitment to attend and fully engage and participate and feed this information back to the wider community, yet, this is being lost in translation. Volunteers are being burnt out by this process, by the number of meetings they must attend, by the very fact that meetings are by in large held in the mornings or afternoons, automatically elements a vast number of volunteers, yet the guidelines state, that they can only sit on a few committees, though does not state how this is actually going to translate into clear strategic actions. PPN's are being tied up in knots of bureaucracy and paperwork. If because of these rulings a PPN is prevented from nominating to a body (sometimes requested at very short notice) and therefore there is no representation, the PPN is then blamed for failing to take park in the community engagement process. This section of the guidelines should refer to representation on bodies coming from a wider pool as is possible, accepting the constraints that volunteers have on their free time.

The PPN user guidelines should acknowledge that community engagement and participation is central to the success of Public Participation and this should be reflective and inclusive of the community, and the authentic community engagement process.
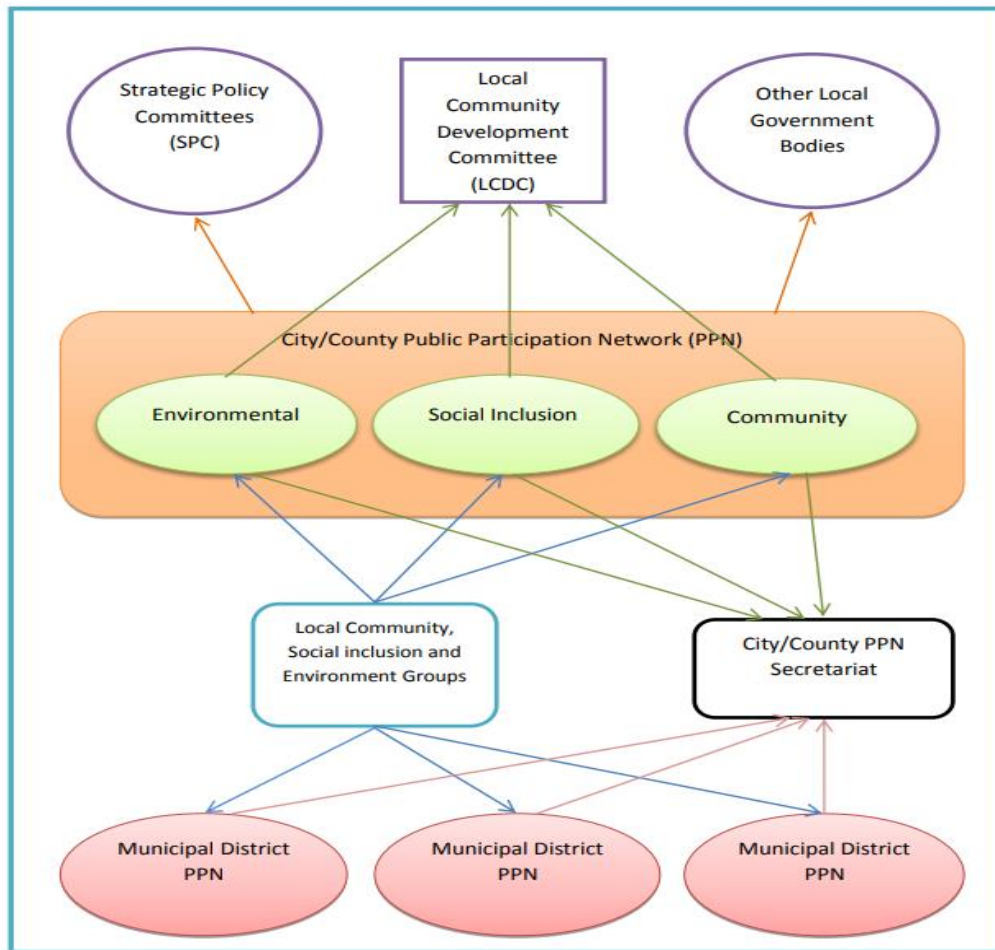
1. The language / jargon contained within the User Guide is not user friendly. The whole ethos of the PPN's is about citizen engagement, empowerment and socially inclusive, yet the language that is imposed on the PPN's is the complete opposite and is excluding and using academia language rather than socially inclusive user friendly language.

2. KPI – Key performance Indicators, all the language used is about numbers, not about people and the pressure being brought to bear on **Volunteers.** Suggested Indicators to be collated on an Annual Basis

   - Number of members of the Network•
   - Number of representatives on decision making bodies
   - • Number of decision making bodies that the Network is represented on
   - • Level of attendance at decision-body meetings by PPN Representatives.

- Level of attendance at Linkage Group meetings by PPN
- Representatives on decision-making bodies.
- Number of consultation workshop held by the Network
- Number of newsletters issued
- Number of email newsletters circulated
- Qualitative indicators, e.g. related to effectiveness would need to be developed
- Number of training supports developed or held for Network representatives
- Number of feedback forms completed by representatives
- Number of submissions made in relation to new policies/plans
- Number of hits on web site

3. Though acknowledging that the FLAT STRUCTURE is not up for discussion as it is not part of the consultation? The Kerry PPN would still like to state that it is not a workable structure. Opening bank accounts, going for charitable status all require officers and will not accept a flat structure. Meetings can of course be chaired on a rotating basis, once there is consistency and support for the effective and efficient running of the PPN and in effect support to the Development Officer and Support Worker.

4. That the Department issue a clear statement instructing the CE of LA to inform all departments within their remit that the PPN'S are the route for information sharing for the LA.

5. Regarding the PPN budget, circular needs to be communicated to all clearly outlining the structure etc. When the LA handles the funding on behalf of the PPN, A clearly understood, adhered to financial report shall be provided by the LA finance Department to the PPN Secretariat on a monthly basis. Spending shall be authorised by the PPN Secretariat alone and when so authorised, shall be processed immediately. The PPN budget process between the LA and the Department need to be streamlined and aligned with each other.

6. The present budget needs to be index linked to the cost of living and also linked to the travel needs of rural counties.

7. Due to the peripheral nature of County Kerry, groups would benefit from online meetings and postal votes should be considered.

8. The area of independence of PPN's needs to be articulated to all and especially to the department management in which PPN sits as boundaries are crossed and independence in the real sense is not being understood.

9. Any submissions / consultations / reports being carried out by the PPN are clearly understood to be independent and cannot under any circumstances be edited, varied or changes made to them by LA personal.

10. Any reports done by the PPN are signed by the PPN Secretariat and the LA can have sight of them, not to amend, edit or vary any part of the document: otherwise strict penalties should be attached.

11. That boundaries are clearly defined, understood and communicated to the LA staff within the Department that they are positioned in, in particular with regard to the PPN Resource Worker and Support worker's role and responsibility as they are being put in difficult positions with regard to being situated within the LA, while being the sole support and reporting directly to the PPN.

12. Any reports by the LA about the PPN need to be sent to the PPN Secretariat for approval.

13. At all times the PPN guidelines should acknowledge and appreciate it is produced for volunteers, not employees.