

PPN User Guide Consultation

Submission from the PPN Regional Meeting, 26th March 2019, Limerick

The meeting took the format of a facilitated session following the structure of the consultation paper circulated by the Department of Rural and Community Development (the Department). There were participants in total, representing the following PPNs:

PPN	Resource Worker	Secretariat	Other
Kerry	1	2	
County Cork		1	
Limerick		1	
None – ‘Student’			1
None – ‘Community Activist’			1

The consultation followed the format of the online consultation form and the User Guide contents. Participants were asked to identify areas that of improvement, expansion or clarity required within the User Guide to make it a more practical supporting document. They were also asked to identify what, if any, areas should be made mandatory. The point was made that the User Guide should be a ‘living document’ with flexible options available. Recommendations, with dissent where indicated, were made as follows:

Structure of the PPN

The session opened with a clear statement by a number present that, while acknowledging that it was outside of the scope of the current review of the User Guide, the flat structure does not work and should be noted to be reviewed.

There was a strongly held view in the room that the language of the PPN should be reviewed to bring clarity to the roles and structures – that words like ‘Secretariat, Plenary, Resource Worker’ were not easily understood.

The new structures should be reflected in this section, i.e. the Secretariat and Resource Worker national and regional meetings and bodies.

Some within the group felt that a review of the ‘top down’ approach to the imposition of structures was required to take account of what was possible in different areas and that the User Guide should be less prescriptive about the structures.

There was a consensus view that there should be a clear statement that the PPN was the route for the Local Authorities.

It was also felt that those PPNs with a large geographical spread would benefit from the use of online groups and meetings and postal voting should be facilitated.

A suggestion was made to remove the reference to representatives only being allowed on 1 committee, as this is not reflective of the reality on the ground in the PPNs represented in the consultation event.

Finally in this section there was suggestion that the role of volunteerism be strengthened in the next iteration of the User Guide.

Activities of the PPN

The group were then asked to reflect on the activities of the PPN and how they might best be represented in an updated User Guide.

It was felt that the activities were currently sufficiently represented within the User Guide, but how they operated needed to be strengthened.

A suggestion was made that 'timely and substantial' be included in reference to consultations.

In terms of meetings, the suggestion was made that there be a reference to respectful proceedings, with the inclusion of a Code of Conduct for meetings or Charter.

The group felt that training should not be mandatory, in recognition of the skills of the volunteers, but that new members might require some induction training. Any such induction programme should be at a grassroots level.

Some within the group felt that reference to Linkage Groups should be removed as these were not in place in all PPNs.

Finally on this point, it was felt that reports from representatives should be mandatory to both the Linkage Group and the Secretariat, and that a template should be appended to the User Guide.

Operations of the PPN

There was a broad discussion in respect of the Budget process concerning the Department and the Local Authorities (LAs). It was felt that there needs to be clarity from the LA as there appears to be a gap in the Department and LA processes which are not aligned. Figures and proportions of budget allocations should be mandatory with clarity on the actual budget, rather than hosting fees etc. being deducted from the LA budget line at source at the discretion of the LA. There as also a suggestion that the present Budget should be indexed to Cost of Living.

The group felt that the circular issued by the Department in respect of the payment of expenses should be mandatory.

Where a PPN is applying for registration with the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA), the legal requirements of the CRA should be noted and, where conflicts arise with the current operations requirements of the PPN, the CRA requirements should be given precedence.

Finally on this point, the group sought a detailed list of supports available, with measurable Key Performance Indicators, should be appended.

Relationship with Local Authority

There was a request that the linking of the LA to the community should be strongly referenced in this section.

While there should be an acknowledgement of the use of public monies to fund the PPNs, the group felt that there should be a clear statement of the independence of the PPN, particularly in the areas of consultations and submissions which should not be subject to review by the LA in advance of publication.

The group also felt that reports by the LA about the PPN should be submitted to the Secretariat and signed-off by the full Secretariat and submitted through the LA. There should be no requirement to have the LA sign these reports.

One participant made the suggestion that where the LA edits a report by a community group, the community group should expressly retain the authority to publicly respond to the interference.

In instances of conflict, it was suggested that the Department of Rural and Community Development, as primary funder, be the first arbitrator. If issues are not resolved, they should then go to an independent arbitrator.

There was also a suggestion that mandatory training / information events be held for LAs, particularly where new staff have been recruited to the Community Section. PPN representatives should also have the ability to address LA regional and national meetings.

Finally on this point, there was a suggestion that there be some LA representation at meetings and PPN consultations.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The group felt that there should be a clear set of measurable standards for the PPN.

In respect of the National Advisory Group (NAG), the group felt that every PPN should have a voice on the NAG, including all Secretariats (balanced for the Pillars). It was noted that the results of recent elections to the NAG were awaited. The elections process should also be included in the User Guide.

There was a strong requirement from the group that, on foot of this consultation, a draft User Guide should be circulated for consultation with a review date of 2 months.

There was some discussion as to the possible merits of term limits on the NAG. Two suggestions arose:

- a limit of three terms of three years, with a break before further eligibility for election; or
- left to the democratic will of those voting.

Templates

A range of templates were identified by the group for inclusion in the User Guide which would allow for standardisation and quality assurance across the PPNs and reduce duplication of work. These templates are:

- All policies and procedural documents set out in the Annual Report questionnaire.
- Meetings Code of Conduct / Charter.
- Method for compulsory feedback to Linkage Groups and Secretariat.
- Report template for consultations and a list of documentation required.
- Link to Charities Regulatory Authority website of resources and requirements.
- Annual Report return template (aligned to Aggresso system for ease of use).
- Quality Standards.

Other Areas

It was felt that having the following areas addressed directly in the User Guide would be of benefit:

- National representative structures.
- LA to be held accountable for lack of compliance with the User Guide.
- The balance of representation should be examined and should be more democratic, mirroring the actual groups being represented in the PPNs

The meeting closed.