

Guidance to support engagement with flood risk communities. Partnership working information note.

Introduction:

Partnership working is a term often used and cited in community engagement (CE) but how often is it measured or agreed with the people and communities we are working with? Partnership working is now undoubtedly at the heart of developing and delivering public services. This information note outlines good practice and principles of partnership working and suggest areas where it can be applied when engaging communities before, during and after flooding.

Summary:

- There is a great deal of [good practice](#) in managing flood risk before, during and after incidents, providing a strong base on which to improve partnership working.
- The actions to develop flood risk management plans can be enhanced when they consider how responsible authorities will: *“work closely with individuals and communities to understand their needs, maximise talents and resources, support self-reliance, and build resilience”*, as recommended in the Christie Commission Report (2011) on the future of public services in Scotland.

Key messages:

- Responsible authorities are working together and building partnerships to develop and deliver Flood Risk Management Plans.
- A key area for ongoing improvement is continued engagement between responsible authorities and at-risk communities.
- Greater consideration could be given to how this engagement fits with the wider [community planning](#) and [empowerment agenda](#).

Responsible authorities already develop and deliver a vast area of services in partnership with the people and communities. There is a great deal of excellent practice in partnership working and the good examples will almost always make use of the [National Standards for Community Engagement](#). These are widely used as an engagement and good practice guidance tool and can improve engagement with flood risk communities.

Tips for partnership working in flood risk communities:

Partnerships can be difficult and there are many challenges for responsible authorities in engaging flood risk communities before, during or after a flooding incident. But there are ways of working that encourage and foster partnership working and a sense of common goals and teamwork.

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It is important to pick points in the community engagement process where partnership working can be properly developed and identify and discuss where there are limitations to joint working and decision making.

1. Create together:

This is about early discussions and developing ideas with the community at the earliest opportunity. Communities sensing that decisions have already been made will feel excluded and frustrated at the lost opportunity to engage in the creative phase.

This tip involves communities or groups being invited to propose ideas and offer joint solutions to the issues they face.

2. Identify decision making boundaries:

It's vital that the limits and opportunities to influence decision making are identified in any engagement process so the community is clear what it can and cannot influence.

3. Pursue common goals:

Identify and define shared goals at the earliest opportunity in the engagement process to inform a partnership framework with community representatives, groups and other organisations. This will inform the development of partnership relationships and recognise respective roles in representing their organisations and working with flood risk communities.

4. Partnership communication:

Agree at the earliest opportunity in the engagement process what, where, who and how you will communicate with at all stages in the partnership life cycle.

5. Recognise and value flood volunteers:

Recognise value and celebrate the activities and achievements of flood risk community volunteers. They contribute time, skills and energy to supporting the work of flood risk management activities. This can be done in a variety of ways from a simple thank you to a civic ceremony or a letter of thanks. Further advice on valuing volunteers can be viewed [here](#).

6. Manage conflict:

Conflict is inevitable in any partnership as it involves bringing together different people from different organisations with varied needs and priorities. Managing conflict positively is a key skill to develop in any community engagement process and can involve further training.

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Used in the correct way, constructive conflict can be a powerful partnership tool to facilitate discussions and decision making with flood risk communities

7. Passion has its place:

Those people active in flood risk communities are rightly passionate about the issues that concern them and the people they represent. The passion of responsible authority staff involved also needs to be recognised by community representatives in flood risk communities.

Passion is a motivator and energiser and when used correctly it will inspire partners to contribute and get involved in the collective goals of flood risk communities. Unmanaged community passions can also be a source of conflict and must be acknowledged to manage flood risk communities expectations.

8. Don't steal people's time:

Stealing people's time is reflected through cancelled meetings, turning up late, missed appointments, unreturned phone calls or emails. It sends a message to partners that other priorities are more important and can undermine the aims of the partnership. This is particularly relevant to flood risk community volunteers and those who give their time freely to develop partnerships with responsible authorities.

9. Value and celebrate results:

Value and celebrate results from partnership working however big or small. This encourages greater partnership working and contributes to the collective goals and can help to cultivate future engagement with other flood risk communities.

10. Be honest and clear:

Be honest and clear always about both opportunities and limitations to influence the issues that are important to flood risk communities. Never promise what cannot be delivered to flood risk communities.

11. Deciding on informal or formal partnerships:

Consider the best methods and approaches to develop partnership working with flood risk communities. This can be a combination of both informal and formal community engagement methods and approaches to develop a partnership.

12. Identify partner's strengths and weaknesses:

It can be useful as a partnership to carry out a SWOT analysis of each partner's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This can assist longer term planning and help partners to identify where they can support each other and where they need assistance.

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13. Reviewing partnerships:

It's healthy, useful and effective to consider how partnerships will review and evaluate their activities and agree any changes that are required.

An additional set of partnership planning checklists is available from the SFF on request.

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