



Scottish Participation Framework: From Model to Practice

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The Democratic Society (Demsoc) worked with the Scottish Government in 2017 to develop a Scottish Participation Framework (SPF) that will support the task of enabling and embedding a strong culture and practice of participation at all levels across Government. The Framework sets out the strategic, tactical and operational elements involved in participation, covering both actions and culture.

This paper expands upon initial recommendations made in December and provides an overview of what the SPF is, the context in which it sits, initial tasks that can be delivered before the end of the financial year to assist with the implementation of the Framework, and suggestions for a work programme that would use the framework as a mechanism to bring participation into the everyday business of government, initially in the Scottish Government then through the wider public sector in Scotland.¹

¹ Participation request guidance published in April 2017 states that ‘participation’ is ‘the act of taking part in, or sharing in something’ and an intention of the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015 is ‘to enable the active participation of communities in addressing the issues and opportunities which are of greatest importance to them’
<<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/ParticipationRequests/ParticipationRequestsGuidance>>

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Context

The SPF is closely connected with the Scottish Government’s drive for ‘democratic renewal’.

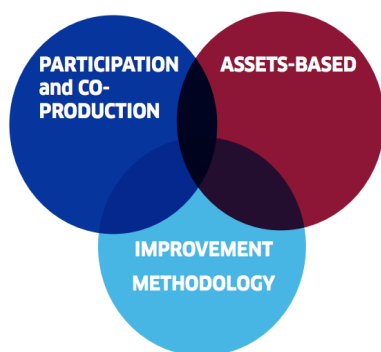
The First Minister has set out a vision of leading “the most open and accessible government in Scotland’s history” and a desire to define and deliver a “Scottish Approach to Government” that “involves people in the work of government” and encourages a more “collaborative government”.

Delivering this vision requires a **transformation programme** that is focused not merely on single actions or initiatives, but the culture and skills in institutions and the public that make participation productive for both sides. It means participation must move from single initiatives into the everyday business of government, as was made clear at the recent Italian Ministerial conference of Open Government Leaders, in which the Scottish Government was well-represented.

The work so far has built a strong foundation for development. Significant progress has been made towards developing a distinctive Scottish approach to involving stakeholders, empowering communities and citizens (including specific service users) to participate in the design of public services. But there is more to be done to deliver effective engagement that is consistent and inclusive, and to deliver more citizen control over decisions and policies that affect their lives.

The Scottish Participation Framework supports the three key aspects of the Scottish Approach to Government:

The Scottish Approach



- **Participation & Co-Production** – SPF makes participative approaches and user involvement part of the normal functioning of government;
- **Asset-Based** – participation infrastructure supports government in making the skills, practices and knowledge that exist in communities and individuals the foundational element of new initiatives;
- **Improvement Methodology** – ensuring participation is long-term and conversational rather than initiative-driven supports continuous improvement in policy and delivery that uses the insights and energy of citizens, service users and officials at every level.

The SPF will help with **“Making the Change”** by providing a clear framework for improvement, and a strategy to engage, empower and motivate the workforce and develop their public participation skills.

The SPF will **“Create Conditions for Change”** by:

- Illustrating a story which helps people to recognise where they have been and where they are going, on the journey to increased and improved public participation practice.
- Setting out a compelling vision of the future, serving as a reference point as the change process moves forward.
- Identifying the key actions towards realising the Scottish Government’s vision of more collaborative government.

The specific actions linked to achieving this are set out from page 8.

We also believe that using the SPF as a driver for internal change will help the Scottish Government fulfil aspects of their Open Government Partnership National Action Plan, including the commitment to increase participation and encourage “more and better engagement.”

The SPF can also help the Scottish Government build the participation infrastructure and internal capacity required to ensure commitments put forward in the most recent Programme for Government to “empower communities” and “put power in people’s hands.”

Finally, the SPF can also help the Scottish Government “to promote and facilitate the participation of members of the public in the decisions” as outlined in Part 10 of the Community Empowerment Act (2015).



Overview of the Scottish Participation Framework

The Scottish Participation Framework developed by The Democratic Society highlights the key **strategic, tactical and operational elements** that need to be understood and in place to make public participation effective.

The SPF is not itself a method or a set of standards for participation, nor is it a categorisation of participation like Arnstein's Ladder.

Instead, it's a structure for thinking about how government can deliver successful public participation, a way of ensuring a comprehensive system approach is taken, and, in the implementation plan set out here, a guide to developing different essential elements together.

By considering each element, the SPF can highlight the gaps that must be filled to ensure public participation practice is embedded in government and is useful for policymakers and citizens. It facilitates the culture change that moves the Scottish Government towards being "the most open and accessible government in Scotland's history".

It works alongside and supports the fulfilment of standards (such as the National Standards for Community Engagement) and strategies such as the Scottish Approach to Government, and through methods such as participatory budgeting, mini publics, crowdsourcing and any other effective processes for participation.

On the basis of the SPF, as we suggest in this paper, the Scottish Government (and other stakeholders) can map, connect and develop participation policy, practice and tools. This will help public servants to become more aware of participation and to increase and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their public participation practice.

The Framework will help the Scottish Government prioritise the internal training and capacity building it needs to ensure that civil servants can deliver, deploy and evaluate effective public participation practice, which delivers good outcomes for policymakers and the people of Scotland.

When the Framework is fully populated, which we can achieve iteratively through the practical approaches we outline in this paper, it will answer the following questions:

- When should the Scottish Government use participation, and what participation approaches should be used for what sort of questions?
- How does the Scottish Government deliver and deploy participation processes?
- What helps the Scottish Government and citizens to create powerful and effective participation in policy making and service delivery, and what stands in the way?
- What action should the Scottish Government take to deliver the culture, skills and practice of participation that meets the First Minister's vision, and how can that action be delivered?

What has happened so far?

During the initial discovery phase for the Scottish Participation Framework, The Democratic Society have:

- Conducted desk-based research into participation within public bodies, methods for mapping participation and the related and component parts of an effective public participation ecosystem.
- Developed a simple framework and model to aid discussions and development.
- Held internal conversations with key Scottish Government staff to explore the findings of our research and to discuss implementation.
- Conducted a listening exercise at the Participation Room 101 event to discover civil servants' attitudes towards participation and worked with other sectors of the Scottish Government to understand their approach and attitude to participation at different levels within the organisation.
- Submitted an early set of recommendations December 2017.

The Scottish Government have created an internal steering group to oversee development of the Scottish Approach to Government, which will include the future direction of the SPF.

Where we start from

Our work so far indicates that there's strong commitment and pockets of good public participation practice within the Scottish Government, however good practice is not widespread across the Scottish Public Sector, those initiatives that do exist are disjointed, and there is a need for connection and capacity building to ensure that the vision of a Scottish Approach to Government can be fully realised.

We're aware that a 'participation network' has existed in various guises in the past, but that it has not been sustained. The establishment of a Scottish

Approach steering group provides renewed energy and will be crucial in driving early developments around the SPF.

The group will need to carefully consider the framing and development of the Scottish Approach to participation, refining the vision and values which will need to be widely disseminated and included in induction processes for new staff. Processes for collating and disseminating key information and case studies to enable staff to share and learn are still to be fully formed, but there are existing staff communication channels such as Saltire and Yammer which can be used immediately.

With the right membership and support, the steering group could be a strategic driving force behind the culture change necessary for a long-term commitment to embedding participatory practice across the Scottish Government. The group has the opportunity to become something more fluid and dynamic, involving more people, when it's firmly established. In the future this could extend to stakeholders outside of the Scottish Government.

In order for a culture of participation to be sustained internally there needs to be buy in at all levels. Regular reiteration of purpose and values should also come from the Executive level to ensure that staff feel permission to undertake participation in new and innovative ways.

Staff must also have a clear understanding of the implications for their everyday work. Providing information alone will not be enough, however, and there's a general sense that staff would benefit from a guided journey designed to inspire, nurture and embed participatory practice, as well as efforts to network the learning from different initiatives to learn and grow.

We heard positive feedback on the Framework as a reflection and prompting tool, but there was also a response that stressed the need for the SPF to provide clearer direction on improving participation practice in order to inspire action. This prompted a need to populate the Framework's scaffolding with the different elements we see now: an agreed set of values, suggested tools and methods, and a practical and asset based approach to training, skills and culture. This is not something that can be done all at once across the breadth of the Scottish Government, but it argues for a programmed and structured development of the SPF from model into practice, as set out below.

Moving from Model into Practice

Moving the SPF from model to practice means creating a plan that develops all of the elements of the framework in parallel. This synchronisation is important because if, for instance, the culture of participation develops faster than the tools through which participation can be realised, new initiatives will use inadequate tools. However, developing the tools without understanding how they can and should be used will create empty process that does not feed into a significant shift in policy or culture.

The plan of action set out here is divided into two phases. The **first phase**, the gets underway in this financial year, defines the core elements of the “why”, and makes a start on the “what” by putting together initial lists of methods and skills. These are confirmed at the start of the **second phase**, which is also the point at which the “how” starts – practical implementation of the operational programme through a series of projects and training.

The logic behind this approach is that for operational activity to be well targeted and to contribute to realising the different goals of the framework, the strategic elements must be clear and firmly rooted, and the tactical understanding must be suitable. By working through the framework from “left to right” we ensure that action is co-ordinated, and the experience of operational implementation can be used to inform a “right to left” evaluation and refresh of the framework at the end of the two-year work programme suggested here.

The programme is designed to start small but spread across the institutions of the Scottish Government and later the broader public sector to create a systemic change movement.

The delivery of this work is a partnership project, between the Scottish government, the broader Scottish public sector, civil society organisations and the public. Particularly important is the relationship between the Scottish Government, as holder of the vision, and the civil society institutions that create the connected civic spaces needed for the framework to work properly. It will be essential, as the framework starts to move cultures, for relationships between citizens, civil society organisations and government to be long-term and not stop-start.

A diagram of the components of the proposed work is displayed below:

WHY strategic	WHAT tactical	HOW operational
Confirming the 'Why' (complete by April)	Discovering the 'What' (underway by April)	'Implementing the How' (starting in April)

Confirming the 'Why'

We suggest that the first element of the work should start in February and March 2018, to populate and clarify each of the strategic aspects of the framework. The end point of this phase is that for each of the different elements the Scottish Government and its partners understand the starting point, recognise the assets available to them, and have a clear direction or end point. So:

- On **Policy and Regulation**, the Scottish Government and its partners understand the current policy framework around participation at local and national level, and how the powers available are being used. They have a sense of the barriers to use of those powers, and areas where the powers in theory or in practice are inadequate or counter-productive. They have a clear understanding of when and how participation should be used, and the possibilities for independent oversight of participation practice. A clear development route for internal policies and regulations is in place to reduce barriers and increase incentives for participation, to be delivered during 2018. We suggest that this element of the work will involve some further desk research and more conversations with key individuals and organisations inside and outside government, building on previous research. A workshop could help design the forward plan for participation-supportive policy and regulation. **[S1]**
- On **Culture and Attitude**, they understand the current attitude around and confidence in participation within the Scottish Government and its partners, have discussed with key people and organisations existing programmes for cultural change and organisational development, and have created a plan for the coming financial year enabling growing confidence and willingness to experiment in improving participation practice. **[S2]**
- On **Values for Participation**, the participation elements of pre-existing values, strategies and political directions are clear, and the partners have come together around a statement of participation values that is rooted in those statements and enhances them. We suggest these are created by a process of synthesis of existing statements, and the creation of a set of participation values that are validated by a conference of key partners in April. There are options for a broader conversation around values and citizens' expectations

of participation, perhaps through a user research approach combined with a deliberative public workshop. [S3]

- On **People**, the partners know the people who are currently involved in creating and supporting participation, and have a model of the communications and networks that a participation exercise should be able to draw on - so, for instance, decision routes, communications routes, and how participation can work across organisational boundaries. There is a clear plan for developing stronger connections and simpler routes for the outcomes of participation. This element of the work will involve some mapping and ideally a partner workshop. [S4]

The Confirming the 'Why' phase of work could be delivered by carrying out further desk research; further interviews with key personnel; deliberation exercises and workshops with the Steering Group and other partners; and facilitating high level involvement in the SPF via themed 'Ask E.T' Events or other appropriate routes. This and other elements of the programme will need dedicated resources inside and outside the Scottish Government, which we discuss further below.

Discovering the 'What'

While work is being done to confirm the "Why" behind increasing public participation practice, we propose that work in parallel explores the **tactical processes** required to embed a strong culture and practice of participation at all levels. 'Discovering the 'What' features two distinct tasks:

- Mapping Methods & Standards [T1]
- Identifying Skills and Learning Gaps via a Participation Skills Audit [T2]

Mapping **Methods & Standards** will help identify new and existing tools that can be used during the "Implementing the 'How'" phase of work. Emerging findings, case studies and method statements could be published on internal communication platforms such as Saltire and Yammer, as well as made public.

A discovery-and-assessment programme, building on the one undertaken for the Scottish Participatory Budgeting programme, should be used to produce a useful shortlist of high-quality tools and methods, that can be easily implemented by the Scottish Government with any necessary support. To the extent possible, this should be a two-sided assessment including views of members of the public as to usability from their perspective.

The **Participation Skills Audit** would be an iterative process that analyses the skill sets of key staff (those most closely involved in participation, and representative staff from other parts of the Government) in order to identify

training and support needs that would be delivered during the “Implementing the ‘How’” phase of work. A maturity modelling approach could be considered.

We understand that completing a Skills Audit of a large number of staff is a challenging and time-consuming process. We suggest that to overcome this issue that the Skills Audit is initially carried out with staff, teams and departments who wish to engage in the proposed SPF Work Programme. The audit can be used as a continuous measurement of progress that will inform further implementation of participation as the Change Programme evolves. In other words, we recommend a **‘Plan, Test & Learn’ approach** to implementation.

In neither case, ‘Confirming the Why’ and ‘Discovering the What’, do we expect the work to be completed by the time the implementation element starts in April – development will start before April but the main element of the process will continue until the summer, with implementation running in parallel.

Implementing the ‘How’

The goal of the Framework and this work programme is the creation of cultural and practice change that delivers the First Minister’s vision. With strategic and tactical elements established or well underway by April, the operational elements of the framework can start.

The operational work brings together the different strands of the Framework in practical action, initially within the Scottish Government but later in its services. The aim of this phase is to shift “the basics” through training and OD to support participative methods, and incremental improvement that makes consultation and participation actions better and more ambitious, while focusing innovation work on a set of exemplar projects that can be used to test methods and tools, to learn, and to develop the narrative of participation internally and externally. The operational work will be overseen by a steering group that holds the vision and strategic plan for the work.

A good starting point would be two exemplar projects, perhaps one where a strategic decision needs to be taken and the policy team wants to experiment with new participative methods, the other an ongoing policy where new models of participation in design or delivery can be tested. Once the development of these initial two is underway, further projects could be started towards the end of the year, perhaps testing work across organisational boundaries.

Each of the projects or test areas will draw on and improve different elements of the Framework. They will take the vision as a starting point. They will use the networks of people identified to ensure that participation draws on the right resources, and is linked to other participation opportunities. They will make use of training and support materials. They will choose the right tools.

As they use each of the elements of the framework, the projects will contribute back into them, improving the understanding of tools, widening the network of people, and identifying new opportunities.

The detailed planning of this phase, including the identification of the projects, will be undertaken during February and March.

Work Programme

To recap, the programme of work we suggest involves:

- **At the strategic level, 'Confirming the Why',** between now and April,
 - Mapping the policy and regulation landscape on participation, identifying real and perceived barriers and understanding how the current framework helps and hinders participation; designing the outline of a better regulation and policy framework; putting a plan in place to deliver that better framework.
 - Creation of a “when and how” guide, that allows officials to understand when participation should be used, and the right approaches for different types of decision. This should be co-created, or at least tested, with a wider stakeholder audience.
 - An options paper on independent oversight of participation activities (such as is currently used in France and being planned in Sweden), through which an independent body sets policy on when and how participation is used in policy making, oversees the running of significant policy exercises, and provides independent assessment (like the OGP’s IRM model) for the entirety of participation activity in government. This independent body could also be a controller of identity and data in relation to participation, providing reassurance to citizens participating in online activities;
 - A series of interviews to assess the current culture and attitude relating to participation within the Scottish Government and its partners; mapping the current organizational development and internal communications programmes that are relevant; a workshop or desktop exercise to developing changes that can increase confidence and drive cultural change; and a plan to deliver that better model.
 - A review of existing public statements, strategies and plans to identify areas where participation is mentioned; the creation of a set of participation values that draw from and build on those; a conference or workshop with a broad audience that commits to those values and discusses plans for the year ahead, with the possibility of including a public engagement process.

- A mapping exercise for the people and connections that are needed to make participative policy making a success, including across boundaries between organisations; an exercise or workshop to plan a better model. Implementation developed through the “operational” phase.
- **At the tactical level**, ‘Discovering the ‘What’, during the first half of the year,
 - A research and assessment process, involving civil servants and citizens, to consider methods and standards, leading to a list of appropriate tools and methods, and an understanding of how the use of the different tools and methods would need to be supported by organizational development, policy and practice change.
 - An iterative skills audit leading to the development and delivery of a training programme;
 - A paper reviewing the data and technological underpinnings needed for the effective delivery of the tools and methods that have been assessed as suitable for the Scottish context.
- **At the operational level**, ‘Implementing the How’, from April onwards,
 - Two supported projects, later four
 - Training and technical support for those projects
 - Connection into wider participation opportunities for project leaders and participants
 - Evaluation and learning to improve and develop strategic and tactical elements of the Framework

The bulk of this work could be done within the Scottish Government, with additional support useful in areas where national/local issues are being considered (where The Democratic Society, for instance, has experience through the participatory budgeting and Fairer Scotland processes), where community and individual relations are relevant (where SCDC, for instance, has expertise and wide networks) and on issues of OD and internal communication.

A rough project outline is set out below.

An estimate of costs and resource considerations will be circulated following feedback and agreement on the direction of the SPF work programme.

Timeline for implementation

Dates	Activities and Outputs	Goal
February / March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal agreement of the next steps for the participation framework Work starts on mapping and research exercises Workshop on people and/or culture change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing the strategic baseline
March / April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalisation of strategic elements Partner event to agree values and discuss forward plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalising the strategic understanding Progress on tactical level Internal publicity
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public launch Projects 1 and 2 start Development and roll out of materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External publicity Start of operational work
May / June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of initial Skills Audit & Method Mapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of tactical work
Summer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects 3 & 4 identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extending framework work beyond organizational boundaries
Autumn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Projects 3 & 4 start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing delivery, capturing learning and evaluating
Early 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New wave of projects begins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuing delivery, capturing learning and evaluating
Early 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review and reflection, revision of Framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of evaluation



Better democracy, everywhere

The Democratic Society Limited
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The Democratic Society (Demsoc) works for more and better democracy, where people and institutions have the desire, opportunity and confidence to participate together. We work to create opportunities for people to become involved in the decisions that affect their lives and for them to have the skills to do this effectively. We support governments, parliaments and any organisation that wants to involve citizens in decision making to be transparent, open and welcoming of participation. We actively support spaces, places and processes to make this happen.

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