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Facilitating community involvement: practical guidance for practitioners and policy makers

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Summary

As part of the civil renewal agenda, the Government is encouraging greater participation in the delivery and governance of local initiatives and public services. This paper is based on a systematic review of 'what works' in community involvement in area-based initiatives (ABIs)¹, which was commissioned by the Home Office to inform its agenda on civil renewal². The paper is intended to provide practical guidance for practitioners and policy makers on how to facilitate effective community engagement and draws on findings primarily from three chapters of the main review. A full copy of the systematic review and its overall conclusions are available on the RDS web site.

Twenty-six empirical studies and eight reviews were included in the systematic review. The results showed that there are no simple answers to what works in facilitating community engagement. The local context in which engagement takes place is of central importance and hence a flexible variety of techniques, methods and support needs to be adopted for each particular initiative. Methodological problems were apparent in many of the studies reviewed; however, general agreement across some of the evaluation studies was found regarding the reported effectiveness of certain practices in facilitating community involvement. The impact of community engagement on ABIs was less clear although emerging evidence did suggest that more positive than negative effects were obtained in improved public services and strategies, in personal and community development and in a greater sense of inclusion, self-respect and self-esteem among the members of the local community. More sophisticated methods of research design incorporating high-quality qualitative and quantitative measures need to be adopted if future studies are to give a clearer indicator of the impact of community involvement on the wider long-term personal and instrumental success of area-based initiatives.

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1. Burton, Goodlad, Croft *et al* 2004 [add in weblink](#)
 2. 'Community Involvement' was defined in this review as either involvement by individuals or representatives of community or voluntary organisations in public policy design and implementation; or participation in voluntary or community organisations; or informal involvement with family, friends and neighbours.
'Area-based initiatives' was defined in this review as publicly funded initiatives targeted on areas of social or economic disadvantage, which aim to improve the quality of life of the residents through multi-faceted programmes of intervention normally at ward/neighbourhood level.

Home Office Development and Practice Reports draw out from research the messages for practice development, implementation and operation. They are intended as guidance for practitioners in specific fields. The recommendations explain how and why changes could be made, based on the findings from research, which would lead to better practice.

Key findings

There are no simple answers to what works in facilitating community engagement; local context is of central importance when examining what works in facilitating community involvement in particular ABIs. A variety of techniques, methods and support has to be adopted to ensure optimal conditions for community engagement.

However, the reviewed research provided some consensus on practices which seemed generally effective in facilitating community engagement. Effective practices fell under the following main headings:

- identify local circumstances that may present barriers to effective community involvement (e.g. lack of transport infrastructure) and act on these;
- acknowledge the diversity of local communities and develop both targeted and universal strategies to reach all members of the local community including traditionally 'hard to reach' groups such as women, young people, people with a disability and members of minority ethnic groups;
- publicise and raise awareness of the initiative among all members of the local community;
- involve local residents in the management of the project;
- budget and plan for community development, training and capacity building from the start, ideally involving the local residents in the planning process;
- provide a variety of opportunities for training and support for local people and professionals;
- use regular evaluation of the initiative as a tool to identify barriers to community involvement and actions to address these;
- establish effective ways of partnership working between statutory and non-statutory agencies and the local community;

The impact of community involvement on the success of ABIs was unclear from the available literature. However, emerging evidence on the impact of community engagement in ABIs did suggest that more positive than negative effects were obtained in improved public services and strategies, in personal and community development and in a greater sense of inclusion, self-respect and self-esteem among members of the local community. A sense of empowerment, a levelling of power between community representatives and other stakeholders, and a sense of inclusion were all reported in many studies.

Many of the existing evaluation studies have methodological problems, which can compromise the validity of the results. Important research gaps remain in the literature and more high-quality evaluation studies of specific aspects of community involvement are required. Larger scale studies combining qualitative and quantitative research methods and advanced statistical analysis of data on public attitudes and behaviour are needed to provide a better evidence base for informed policy development in this field in the future.

Introduction

Promoting active community involvement is central to the Home Office's agenda and a large amount of resource is devoted to maximising community involvement in area-based government initiatives. Despite the growing interest in this area, little is known about what practice is effective in facilitating community involvement in different contexts and how community engagement may impact on the success of area-based initiatives (ABIs). The newly founded Civil Renewal Unit within the Home Office commissioned a systematic review to draw together the existing research evidence from previous and current ABIs. The aim was to determine the impact of different practices aimed at increasing community involvement on the success of ABIs.

The review found that the existing research evidence on this topic suffered from a range of methodological problems, which can compromise the validity of the results. There were no simple answers on how to increase community engagement; however, due to the sheer volume of research in this field and its general agreement of what works in facilitating community engagement, the review did highlight a number of principles of practice that seemed useful in different contexts. Emerging evidence suggests that the local context is an important factor in determining what works in getting local people and community groups involved in ABIs. Local circumstances, which can have an impact on the willingness of local people to engage in ABIs, include:

- the previous history and patterns of community involvement;
- the purpose of the involvement and how far practice matches purpose for different groups;
- the characteristics of people targeted for involvement;
- the type of activities or decisions that local residents are being invited to get involved with;
- controversial issues in the area, such as a threat to a service;
- geographical aspects such as transport problems; and
- national, institutional and financial regimes;
- the level of resources provided for the initiative.

The systematic review also found emerging evidence regarding the impact of community involvement on the success of ABIs and suggestions on how to develop more robust evaluation studies in future ABIs. This paper summarises some of the main findings of the systematic review. The paper is intended to provide practical guidance for practitioners and policy makers on how to facilitate effective community engagement and draws on findings primarily from three chapters of the main review. A full copy of the review and its overall conclusions are available on the RDS web site³.

Firstly, this paper will briefly describe the method used to collate the information on what works in community involvement in ABIs. Secondly, the main findings of the review will be presented both in terms of principles which seemed effective in facilitating community engagement generally, and in specific contexts. Finally, a summary and evaluation of the research in this area and recommendations for future research will be provided on which a better evidence base can be created for informed policy development in this field.

Methods

The search for relevant evaluation studies led to a total of 26 empirical studies and eight reviews being included in the review⁴. Most studies selected focused explicitly on community involvement in ABIs but had little to say about the overall impact of community involvement on the achievement of the ABI's objectives. Very few studies had an explicit focus on the impact of community involvement on the overall success of an ABI. A few studies focused on ABIs but were not exclusively concerned with community involvement.

A number of methodological problems became apparent while classifying and assessing the evaluation literature. These problems included:

- the reliance on community activists' views rather than wider reference to the local community's views on the success of community involvement or of the ABI⁵;

3. Burton, Goodlad, Croft et al 2004 [add in weblink](#)

4. Studies of involvement by any categories of people were included, as were ABIs in specific policy fields as long as they were multi-faceted in terms of involving more than one type of intervention.

5. It can be argued that no real impact can be measured without obtaining the views of the people who have been targeted, especially as the review found emerging evidence that different stakeholders in the partnerships perceived the success of the initiative differently.

- the lack of a common definition of what is meant by 'community';
- the inability to predict what would have happened in the absence of the initiative;
- the possible impact of change in policies and funding between the beginning and the finish of the initiative;
- the possible impact of 'spill-over' effects of the initiative to neighbouring areas and 'shadow' effects on the targeted area from neighbouring areas;
- the possible impact of other initiatives operating in the targeted area on the willingness of the local community to become involved in the ABI;
- the inability to compare the level of community involvement between different ABI areas due to the various combinations of initiatives and/or intervention programmes already operating in different areas; and
- the confusion about whether the result of the ABI reported in the literature refers to the authors' or participants' views of the potential or actual benefits and challenges.

Due to the methodological problems outlined above, the findings documented in this paper need to be treated as emerging evidence and applied appropriately, though the research does provide some interesting anecdotal evidence for practice that seems effective in facilitating community involvement in ABIs.

Findings

Broad agreement was found in relation to how community involvement might be facilitated in a number of different ways depending on the circumstances of the particular ABI. The following section provides information on general principles that appear to increase community engagement before going on to discuss specific circumstances. The section concludes with a sub-section on potential obstacles to facilitating community involvement that those working in ABIs need to be aware of.

Good practice tips in creating effective community involvement

Effective project management, training and capacity building, information/publicity and evaluation of the progress of ABIs can be important factors in facilitating and sustaining community involvement in ABIs.

Project management

The review found that, in respect of general project management, many forms of involvement were judged successful. These ranged from membership of committees and boards, through service user groups, the employment of local people as permanent staff or sessional workers, to direct community control of projects or services. Practices that may be helpful in engaging local residents in the project management of the ABI include:

- the value of directly employing local residents, not least in providing advice and support that was accessible to their peers and in demonstrating the capacity of local people to cope with such jobs;
- the value of local residents serving on project management boards or committees;
- the need to provide a variety of levels or degrees of community involvement opportunities to accommodate people's different levels of availability;
- the need to budget and plan for community development, training and capacity building from the start, ideally involving local residents in the planning process;
- the need to clearly articulate the role expected of the community across a range of activities from direct engagement in project management to more selective involvement in strategic planning;
- the value of adopting structures that remain transparent and open to increasing community participation over the lifetime of the ABI as the nature of community engagement is by definition uneven.

Training and capacity building

General agreement was found across the reviewed evaluation studies of the importance of providing support and resources to stimulate and sustain community involvement. More specifically:

- training and capacity building seemed to benefit from being able to operate from a local base, usually at which other activities take place as it can be unrealistic to expect local residents to travel far in order to receive training and support of this type;

- formal training is usually more effective at developing strategic skills, whereas experiential learning has most impact at the community project level;
- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) such as video can be especially effective in developing both self-confidence and the capacity to express local issues in imaginative and engaging ways;
- successful consultation can lead to a need for further levels of capacity building and training. Therefore, it can be useful to offer local residents the opportunity of more advanced and sophisticated forms of training;
- joint training for residents and members of local communities and local professionals can be valuable, especially in creating greater trust and understanding;
- individuals in more formal bodies seem to require very focused support to maximise their effectiveness. Help may be needed in understanding policy jargon, discussion of agenda items prior to formal meetings and the development of strategies for intervention at meetings;
- building capacity of all partners in the ABI – not just community members – can be beneficial although this investment may not bear fruit in the first year or two of the initiative. For example, managerial competencies are particularly needed for key project staff/community representatives when the project becomes established;
- involving local people in the evaluation of ABIs by employing, training and supporting them can be especially effective in developing the local people's skills, self confidence and sense of self-esteem and may provide them with the skills to take up full time employment;
- both local residents and other representatives can benefit from training and support in learning to deal with difficult conditions such as situations with tensions and lack of consensus between various members of the partnership structure;
- local university staff or similar can sometimes offer invaluable technical and research support to community representatives/residents and the ABI.

Information/publicity

In order to increase the involvement of local members of the community in the ABI, it is recommended that all members of the community are made aware of the initiative operating in the area either through regular newsletters or other 'advertising'. In addition, providing information on the 'outputs' of the ABI may have a positive impact on the way local residents view their current position and hence allow them to see the direct impact on their own lives. Maximising local involvement seemed to be best assisted by:

- ensuring that local residents who were not active or directly involved in the ABI were informed of the active involvement of some of their local peers;
- ensuring that consultation events and community forum meetings as well as report progress were advertised widely to reach the broadest possible audience.

Evaluation of the progress of ABIs

Evaluations of ABIs were often of poor quality partly due to lack of sufficient funding but could have an impact on supporting community involvement. Evaluation can help to measure not only the impacts but also the processes by which the ABI works and thereby unravel the methods of best practice in facilitating community involvement specific to each particular initiative. To optimise the outcome of an evaluation in a way that effectively takes account of community involvement, the evaluation should be carried out, possibly with the help of community members, at key points in the process of the initiative. There are various stages at which a greater or lesser level of evaluation could be usefully applied. These stages include:

- at the end of the process of bidding for funds or recognition, in order to ascertain the quality and quantity of community involvement in the bidding process;
- at the conclusion of the production of the delivery plan, to assess the impact of the proposed programme on the local communities;
- at the point of establishing formal partnership structures, to gauge the extent to which there are genuine opportunities for community involvement in the formal management of an initiative;
- at the end of each substantive project, to learn any lessons for future project development and management;
- at the end of each year of the programme, to review overall progress and develop guidelines for the next phase of work.

Good practice tips in creating effective community involvement under specific circumstances

Certain practices seemed to be particularly effective in facilitating community engagement in ABIs under specific circumstances. These circumstances are grouped under working practices, geographical location and engaging hard to reach groups.

Working practices

Partnership working

Partnerships in ABIs involving statutory and non-statutory agencies and the representatives of local communities are common and emerging evidence suggests that these may foster greater ownership by local people of the outcomes of the ABI, enhance local residents' sense of identification with the local area and foster greater co-operation, communication and contact between formal agencies, members of the local community and others. Involving local residents and community organisations in a partnership produced more often than not positive impacts on the success of the ABI. Successful community involvement seemed to be best achieved if:

- agendas were not fixed in advance and could therefore be shaped by the partnerships' consultation with a wide spectrum of community views encompassing excluded groups;
- visioning techniques were used to enable all relevant stakeholders to construct a shared vision of the future they hoped to achieve. This broad vision could subsequently be translated into workable objectives, through the systematic preparation of an action plan;
- meetings of partnerships were run with more flexible agendas, allowed more time for discussion, less rapid decision-making and relied less on jargon in order to facilitate the active and effective involvement of community representatives. Certain individuals in key roles – such as the chair of a local partnership board – can be very influential in determining the style of these meetings;
- the partnership built on existing structures of community organisation and representation in which community groups could easily work and which were therefore more likely to capture the enthusiasm and commitment of local residents;
- partners were encouraged to listen to community representatives even when there were difficulties in reaching agreement on issues of local concern;
- the partnership communicated both project successes and failures to local residents and was open about the limits on change, the comparative costs of different activities and the likely time-scale for seeing meaningful change;
- a patient and collaborative ethos was established among local professionals in which disagreement and conflict was managed effectively and without over-riding the views of the community representatives especially during community forums;
- time was allowed for the skills and attributes of effective partnership working to develop among all members of the partnership;
- community representatives and local professionals recognised that they did not always see the same purposes for community involvement. Local professionals were more likely than community representatives to view the personal development of community representatives as the beneficial outcome of community involvement, whereas community representatives mainly viewed community involvement as an opportunity to achieve policy and service or other tangible gains for their local area;
- the partnership encouraged sharing of resources with other programmes by working in partnership with existing projects operating in the area;
- the initiative was executed with support of enthusiastic local leaders who had a degree of independence from the organising or sponsoring body;
- local businesses were drawn into the partnership.

Community consultation and awareness:

Community consultation and awareness raising may be important factors in facilitating community engagement in ABIs. Relying solely on community representatives in partnerships or other formal structures may not represent the full diversity

of the community and other types of involvement channels are therefore needed. Additional channels of involvement can take the form of community newspapers, 'fun days', information fairs, community conferences or direct approaches to service users and community groups. Some studies reported that certain practices seemed to make community consultation and awareness raising more effective. These practices include:

- careful planning and preparation of any consultation process or event;
- time for consultation which should be built into the lead times for project and programme development;
- the importance of using skilled and experienced facilitators, including those experienced in working with particular groups;
- choosing consultation methods to suit the circumstances;
- providing feedback on the achievements of the initiative as promptly as possible;
- working with and through existing groups which can be particularly effective.

Public meetings and community forums:

Public meetings and community forums were generally found to be insufficient as an approach to community involvement since it could be hard to build consensus as either the community's views were often suppressed or difficulties were found in coping with the volume or diversity of views. It is therefore advisable to include other forms of involvement including more innovative methods such as consensus conferences, community visioning exercises, drama etc.

Geographical locations

Rural initiatives:

To maximise community involvement in community projects in rural areas, it is necessary to be aware of the potential problems associated with low population density. Two potential problems are the possible lack of identification between neighbouring rural communities, which may result in a lack of co-operation between these areas, and the lack of transport infrastructure.

The review drew a distinction between involvement by the community at strategic level and at 'grassroots' level. Linking the two levels is a challenging task for community representatives who may require support to create accountability mechanisms. Further, intermediate bodies can help by:

- targeting funds directly to rural communities;
- managing the burden of bureaucratic requirements associated with particular funding streams;
- developing local community capacity and confidence;
- linking different community involvement initiatives;
- representing community views on more strategic level bodies;
- ensuring that community representatives on strategic and other bodies remain accountable to their local communities.

Also, organising and/or covering the costs of travelling in rural areas seem to help to stimulate community engagement.

Engaging hard to reach groups

Community workers are often faced with specific challenges when trying to engage certain minority groups. The following sub-section provides information on principles relating to diversity and inclusion in general and subsequently in relation to the following specific interest groups:

- young people;
- disabled people; and
- minority ethnic groups and faith communities.

Diversity/inclusion

Although women and members of minority ethnic groups may be engaged in more informal community involvement, these groups are often under-represented in ABIs. Women were often excluded because of a combination of lack of confidence, poverty related issues and domestic responsibilities, whereas members of minority ethnic groups were in some instances excluded due to language or cultural difficulties. Also, local professionals sometimes based their judgement of whether to involve certain members of ethnic minority groups on the assumption that their religion or other ethnic characteristics would prevent them from becoming actively involved in the ABI. Other under-represented groups

include people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, disabled people, young people and homeless people. The review found that overcoming the problem of under-representation of certain groups in ABIs required, first, recognition of the diversity of the local community. Effective methods of involvement include:

- ensuring the use of both universal and targeted strategies to facilitate community involvement both as a wider programme of tackling social exclusion but also to ensure the involvement of easily excluded groups such as women and minority ethnic groups;
- ensuring that community partners recognise the valuable inputs from local people with different backgrounds and act on the recommendations arising from formal and/or informal consultation with the local people regarding possible barriers to get involved in the ABI;
- ensuring that local professionals involve all local people to provide them with a sense of ownership of the project;
- ensuring that other partners, especially public sector partners, understand the processes and consequences of a genuine community development approach;
- engaging directly with individuals through personal correspondence;
- ensuring that any involvement structures have legitimacy in the eyes of the local residents by deciding on the formal basis for representative involvement and accountability, whether by election or by giving all residents a direct vote on, for example, a community forum.

Specific interest groups

Young people:

Young people are generally less confident and less experienced than adults and therefore require greater support than their adult counterparts. Young people and adults may also sometimes have different views about priorities. Adults tend to focus on the perceived training and education needs of young people, while the young people themselves are sometimes more concerned about changing the perceptions that adults have of them and improving the relations they have with other local professionals such as the police. Community involvement of young people seemed to be improved by providing a visible and relatively formal channel for involving and communicating with young people such as a well-organised and well-resourced youth forum or youth council. However, care has to be taken with youth forums or councils to ensure:

- they are carefully integrated into wider ABI processes;
- the young people involved are assisted to be accountable to the wider constituency of young people;
- they are not seen as a token device to legitimise decisions taken by adults rather than to allow young people's involvement to make an impact on the ABI.

Disabled people:

Despite moves by the government to provide support to people with a disability, a number of barriers still exist, which need to be removed if more disabled people are to become actively involved in ABIs. More specifically:

- officers and managers do not always see disability as a key issue, even when they have a general commitment to work with excluded groups;
- budget constraints within schemes would be challenged if adequate provision was made for people with a disability;
- disability is sometimes felt to be beyond the technical capacity of some of those working within ABIs;
- those working within disability groups may have poor knowledge of policies and programmes;
- many people with a disability know little about the world of ABIs and lack easy access to information about initiatives;
- few disabled groups have the resources to engage effectively with community organisations, especially in bidding for funds;
- people with a disability who are active in ABIs often face considerable difficulties of accessibility;
- people with a disability can face multiple forms of exclusion on account of age, gender, ethnicity or class as well as their disability.

Greater community involvement among disabled people may be assisted by:

- re-defining disability, to take on more of the social rather than medical conception and thereby allow people with a disability to be recognised as relevant to ABIs;

- identifying and paying special attention to disabled people at a strategic level, especially in national and regional policy documents that are concerned with ABI funding;
- ensuring that all programme managers are aware of the implications and their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- providing more time for consultation, especially in defining the priorities of the initiative at a local level so that more genuinely inclusive programmes can be developed;
- ensuring that all information is available in accessible formats so that people with a disability can know of the opportunities to participate and of the substance of local ABIs.

Minority ethnic groups and faith communities:

Only one study was included in the review which was concerned with how to engage members from faith communities in ABIs. This reflects a paucity of research in this area and caution is recommended when interpreting the findings outlined below. However, the study did highlight some promising and interesting findings on how members of faith communities may bring additional resources to the ABI, the problems which community workers may sometimes be confronted with when trying to engage this minority group and how to resolve these potential obstacles to greater community participation. The main findings were that:

- faith communities can bring many distinctive resources to the initiative, including a strong commitment to social action, a long-term presence in many areas, a commitment to listen carefully to people and spaces for informal activities. However, there are significant inequalities in the extent to which different faith groups are willing and able to bring these important resources to the ABI;
- due to their highly diverse theologies, values and forms of organisation, effective engagement with faith communities usually requires local professionals who have a thorough knowledge about faith issues and therefore can respond sensitively to challenges in reconciling religious and secular conflicts without excluding members of faith communities;
- urban initiatives provide an opportunity for developing greater understanding and trust between diverse communities, including communities of faith. However, differences of faith can also lie at the heart of long term divisions within geographical communities and create fundamental problems for effective policy.

Potential obstacles to community participation and effective community involvement

A number of factors may have an impact on the level of community involvement and the success of the ABI.

Factors that may present obstacles to greater community involvement include:

- the local residents' lack of time or interest in the activities of the initiative. For example, emerging evidence suggests that it is easier to attract local residents to become involved in community based projects which concern housing, poverty or young people's prospects than in schemes solely focusing on economic development, employment or training;
- the provision of separate channels for involvement for particular groups (e.g. those with a particular age or ethnicity) can be worthwhile but they require a lot of support. Both targeted and universal strategies need to be adopted to promote more widespread community involvement;
- a lack of recognition of any lessons learned from earlier activities in previous ABIs in the same area;
- a rigid agenda set in advance, which is not open to the influence of community involvement and consultation;
- the use of questionnaires and/or surveys alone when engaging in community consultation;
- undue 'out of hours' pressures on local residents and the risk of intimidation;
- a small number of local people (sometimes disparagingly referred to as 'the usual suspects') who sometimes dominate community involvement. However, the longevity of involvement by a few community members can under certain circumstances be beneficial as some initiatives suffer from a problem of high turnover and consequential loss of community memory and experience;
- lack of sufficient funding although no general agreement was found as to what constitutes sufficient funding;
- the risk of focusing the available funding on facilitating community engagement at the expense of ensuring the sustainability of the ABI.

Conclusion and recommendations for future research in policy development

Most of the literature on civil renewal and the evaluation studies of community involvement in ABIs imply that there is a direct link between greater community engagement and the success of an initiative. Although the findings from the systematic review indicated that certain techniques and processes could improve community involvement and the partnership between local residents and local professionals, few of the findings provided the basis for a robust conclusion about the prime concern of the review. However, emerging evidence on the impact of community engagement in ABIs did suggest that more positive than negative effects were obtained in improved public services and strategies, in personal and community development and in a greater sense of inclusion, self-respect and self-esteem. A sense of empowerment, a levelling of power between community representatives and other stakeholders, and a sense of inclusion were all reported in many studies. These outcomes are likely to have a positive impact on individual life prospects as well as social cohesion and greater community engagement in the local area in the future.

Two rare examples with a direct measurable outcome of the success of the ABI attributed to community involvement are given below:

- a local youth council was supported in providing young people to help manage a local youth service and this group went on to become established; and
- the steering group of a community health shop was faced with waning local participation and drew up an action plan to address this; this succeeded in both replenishing the number of people involved and attracting a broader range of people (Brown, 2002).

If similar research findings are to support the ambitious claims made for the benefits of community involvement on the success of ABIs, a more differentiated conception of community involvement in ABIs is required in order to develop more sophisticated notions of 'what works' in this area of research. This differentiation could consist of developing each of these five relevant dimensions:

- involvement by whom?
- which community or public?
- what degree or form of participation?
- what type of decision making? Involvement in what?
- effectiveness at achieving which aims, held by whom?

Without the framework to differentiate between the particular combination of circumstances that exist in each setting, the question of 'what works' will either remain unanswered or will only be answered in the most general sense.

More effort could be made to learn from general literature about democratic theory, social capital, attitudes towards civic engagement and so on to improve the knowledge base on 'what works' in this field. The evaluation studies should also ensure that they cover the range of aims associated with community involvement including measures of community capacity building, confidence building, skills development and training, as well as the impact that community involvement has had on the success of the ABI. Larger scale research will also be required if comprehensive and robust results are to be made.

If studies are to be designed in a way in which they are able to establish plausible and robust relationships between the various practices of community involvement and the outcomes of ABIs, they will need to make use of a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods as well as advanced statistical and qualitative analysis.

These more extensive research techniques and more quantitative forms of analysis will generally require larger sums of money than are usually available to studies in this field. However, there are alternative ways in which quantitative and qualitative methods could be combined to provide more robust studies than are available at present while taking advantage of some existing research instruments and expertise. One possible approach that would merit further exploration would be to design a study that contained the following components:

- construction of a research team of experts in the evaluation of complex social programmes, ABIs in particular, but also with expertise in democratic theory and community involvement;
- development of a set of hypotheses for testing about the purpose and effects of community involvement in ABIs;

- a carefully designed set of case studies with common research instruments used to explore qualitative aspects of ABIs with citizens, officials and other stakeholders and involving focus group discussions with citizens;
- collection of data on impacts in case studies to include identifiable instrumental effects as well as developmental effects of involvement; and
- use of an existing survey instrument (such as the Home Office Citizenship Survey) to collect data for a representative sample of the population, with the survey extended in two ways:
 1. to cover appropriate questions about community involvement at neighbourhood or other small area level; and
 2. to provide a boosted sample from areas that are the subject of ABIs.

References

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'The interpretation of the review described in this paper is solely the opinion of the author and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of the researchers who carried out the review.'