

Appendix 1

Additional Background and FAQs on VOICE

VOICE is a database planning and recording tool designed to assist individuals and organisations to design and deliver effective community engagement. VOICE has been developed by the Scottish Community Development Centre on behalf of the Scottish Government.

VOICE will support you to:

- plan community engagement and service user participation
- conduct it effectively
- monitor and record the process
- evaluate the outcomes

It can be used to support a range of participation from overall area regeneration to specific concerns of users of particular services. It is designed to be relevant both for individual services and for integrated, cross disciplinary community planning. VOICE enables all users to have a common system for analysing, planning, monitoring, evaluating and recording that provides common protocols, definition of terms and understanding of different types and purposes of engagement.

Why do we need VOICE?

Community participation and engagement is a central feature of public policy across almost all services. Endorsement and adoption of the National Standards for Community Engagement by Scottish national and local government and leading public agencies has set targets for best practice. These targets reflect the desire of public sector reform to deliver outcomes that respond to the aspirations of service users and communities.

The User's Guide to the National Standards for Community Engagement notes: "Community engagement can take many forms, however it is always a process that involves purposeful dialogue between public agencies and communities aimed at improving understanding between them and taking action to achieve beneficial change."

VOICE sets out to support such purposeful dialogue. It recognises that delivering effective engagement is challenging both in relation to specific participation initiatives and in terms of the overall management of the range of initiatives that are conducted. VOICE has been developed to assist with designing and delivering effective engagement at both levels.

Who should use it and why?

VOICE can be used by:

- Staff of front line service units in public, private or voluntary organisations, primarily as a tool to support direct engagement practice
- Intermediate level, operational service managers to maintain a coherent view of what is being done by their staff and units and to plan conduct and evaluate engagement they might initiate
- Strategic planners and managers to ensure a coherent and properly planned approach to engagement, to provide a basis for quality assurance relating to the overall conduct of community engagement and to plan conduct and evaluate engagement they might initiate

VOICE can also be used by community groups and organisations wishing to engage their own communities or initiate engagement between their community and relevant agencies.

How does VOICE work?

VOICE builds on two widely adopted and effective tools:

- [National Standards for Community Engagement](#)
- [Learning, Evaluation and Planning - LEAP](#)

VOICE is organised around the key planning and evaluation steps of **Analyse, Plan, Do and Review**.

Using this structure VOICE asks key questions related to good community engagement that need to be addressed at each step, provides a recording system for the engagement as it develops and enables evaluation and learning from the experience.

When you open the tool you will find that each of the four steps is divided up into a series of key themes and questions, these can be found in the tab to the left.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How can VOICE be used most effectively at a local level?

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

VOICE can be used by individual users or organisations and can also be used in an inter-departmental or multi-agency context. At an early stage it is important to identify how information is to be collected on community engagement across a partnership and who will be responsible for co-ordinating and reporting using VOICE as the platform. If VOICE is to be used to support the strategic implementation and evaluation of community engagement across several partners, it is advisable to avoid running multiple copies of VOICE which will store information independently. In this instance, it is advisable to have one copy of VOICE located on a central server.

SUPPORT FOR THE EFFECTIVE USE OF VOICE

VOICE has been developed to be easily navigable, to reflect outcome-focussed practice and to give the user all the information they need to get started on analysing, planning, conducting and reviewing community engagement. It has been built on the two established frameworks of LEAP and the National Standards for Community Engagement and support materials are contained within the database itself. It is advisable to identify where there may be additional support or training needs for current or potential users not familiar with either the national frameworks or ICT. For further information on support and training [contact us](#).

VOICE AS A LEARNING TOOL

VOICE provides a practical solution to recording the engagement stages of analyse, plan, do and review but it can also be used as a learning resource to conduct effective community engagement processes. Materials which are contained within VOICE to support learning include two worked examples of a community engagement process, handy hints, the National Standards for Community Engagement and associated indicators and link to resources on LEAP and the Scottish Centre for Regeneration 'How to Guide' for community engagement. VOICE also contains guidance on self evaluation scoring criteria.

Q. What are the technical requirements for VOICE?

For successful operation, when you insert the VOICE disk into your CD Rom Drive, you must copy or drag and drop the entire VOICE folder onto your desktop or server. VOICE will not run directly from the disk.

VOICE is a database driven tool which has been developed for Microsoft Access 2003 and requires a minimum of 15MB free hard-disk space. The database can support 100 simultaneous users, although if using over a network much depends on the speed and robustness of the network and workstations. The system can store and process over 30,000 records.

VOICE is a flexible system which means that it can work equally well for an individual on a single computer as for a team over a network.

ACCESS AND RUNTIME

VOICE has been developed on Access 2003 but will operate on Access 2000 upwards. Access is part of the Microsoft Office Suite e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint etc.

Some larger organisations have the Access software as part of the Microsoft Office Suite but restrict its use for security reasons. Where the Access software is available but restricted, your IT team may permit use of the software if a business case is made.

Where Access 2000 onwards is not available, VOICE can be converted to operate on Runtime, which is an alternative programme that gives all the functions of Access. Your IT team will have to set up Runtime for you.

If you are part of a smaller organisation which does not have the Access software or IT support, you will be able to get discounted software and support from organisations like [Ebility Technologies](#) or [CT Xchange](#).

MOUSEHOOK

Mousehook must be in the same folder as VOICE so that the scroll function on your mouse is disabled. This stops random scrolling and allows better navigation through the database. This does not affect any other programme on your computer and all settings return to normal when you exit the database.

Q. Can we tailor VOICE to suit specific requirements?

BESPOKE DEVELOPMENT

VOICE has been developed as a generic tool and has been copyrighted under Queens Printer for Scotland 2008. There is the option to tailor VOICE to meet the specific needs of organisations, partnerships or sectors. Bespoke development will require additional IT support. For further information on bespoke development please contact [Paul Nelis](#) on 0141 222 4841.