Digital Approaches to PB

Workshop Report
September 2020

Community Places

COMMUNITY FUND

PB PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING WORKS

Workshop Programme

13.50 – Workshop Open
14.00 – Welcome, Introductions and Polls
14.15 – Part 1 Presentation: How to design inclusive on-line PB processes and Tools for on-line PB, Kelly McBride, The Democratic Society
14.30 - Q&A Opportunity
14.40 - Breakout Room Discussion and Feedback **What are the opportunities and challenges of Digital PB?**
15.00 – Part 2 Presentation: How to support people to get involved in PB processes which have moved on-line due to COVID-19, Kelly McBride, The Democratic Society *Questions and ideas on how to support people to get involved in Digital PB*
15.25 - Evaluation Poll
15.30 – Thanks and Workshop Close

Introduction and Welcome

On 23 September 2020, 40 participants joined an online zoom-shop to explore digital approaches to Participatory Budgeting (PB). The session was hosted and facilitated by Louise O'Kane, Community Places - PB Works with a guest presentation from Kelly McBride of The Democratic Society.

Louise welcomed participants and invited them to introduce themselves via the chat function. The workshop programme was outlined and it was noted that the workshop is part of the 'Putting People in the Lead through Quality PB' project funded through the National Lottery Community Fund.

Louise highlighted that many people have taken the lead in responding to the needs of their communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear, that there is a growing appetite and expectation that communities and anchor organisations will have greater opportunities to share power and take a direct role in setting the priorities and spending of defined local public budgets. PB can make this ambition a reality in a way which builds trust and creates stronger and more equitable communities. As we continue to live with the restrictions and ongoing uncertainties caused by COVID-19 several planned 'in-room' market-place Participatory Budgeting processes have had to adapt and shift on-line for example, 'Community Cash' delivered by the Fermanagh and Omagh Policing and Community Safety Partnership and 'Tak£500' delivered by the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Community Planning Partnership. This workshop provides an opportunity to discuss both the challenges and opportunities of moving to on-line PB approaches and to explore how we can design and support these processes to be as inclusive as possible.

Louise highlighted that quality PB processes that genuinely put people in the lead, that build trust, create stronger communities, that give people real power over real money, offer an equitable and transformative way forward in planning for recovery and renewal.

A poll was launched to provide a flavour of the sectors represented at the workshop. Just under half of the participants represented a Local Authority (48% - 14); 21% (6) a Statutory Partner; 17% (5) the Community and Voluntary Sector; and 13% (4) Academia

and Other. A second poll was launched to determine the level of knowledge and familiarity of PB amongst participants. 67% (20) of participants have been involved in a PB process however, 57% (17) were new to Digital PB approaches. 40% (12) have some knowledge of PB, with 37% (11) wanting to know more about PB and 10% (3) were entirely new to PB.

Poll 2: How familiar are you with PB?

New to PB	(3/30) 10%
Have some knowledge of PB	(12/30) 40%
Have been involved in a PB process	(20/30) 67%
New to Digital PB	(17/30) 57%
Want to know more about PB	(11/30) 37%
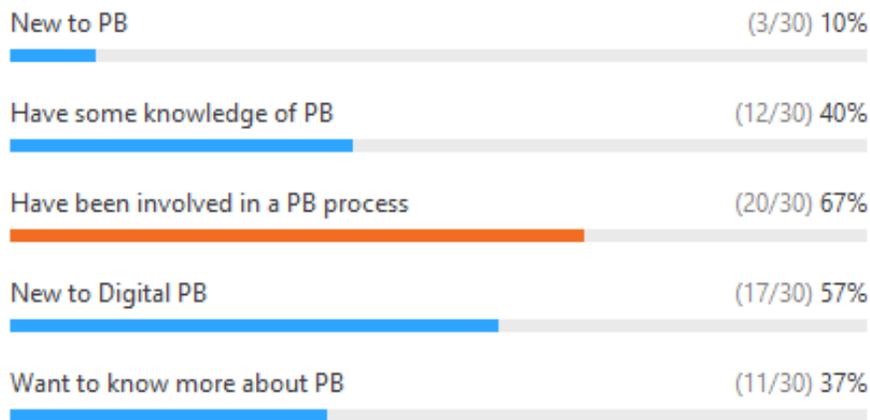
Framing the Conversation

Kelly McBride, The Democratic Society

Louise introduced and extended a very warm welcome to Kelly McBride whose contribution would help to frame the conversation. Kelly shared her extensive experience of planning and supporting digital PB. The input was delivered in two parts. The first part introduced PB, the elements of digital PB in particular, with an emphasis on how to design inclusive on-line processes, proposals and pitches, supporting deliberation, voting options and a selection of the available tools which facilitate on-line PB including for example, Participare and Consul. A recording of Part A is available here and a copy of the presentation slides is available here.

At this point in proceedings the participants were asked to breakout into smaller groups to reflect on the first part of the presentation and to discuss the opportunities and challenges posed by on-line PB processes.

Breakout Sessions

A summary of the key challenges and opportunities identified by participants is presented below. A full record of each of the breakout room discussions can be found at Appendix 2.

Opportunities

- Digital PB has the potential to reach a wider audience as people can get involved at a time which suits them and there are no physical restrictions limiting the numbers who may want to get involved e.g. room size, venue capacity.
- It can be more inclusive, encouraging those who may not otherwise get involved to share their voice e.g. younger people, people with disabilities, those with caring responsibilities.

- Ideas may be disseminated more widely online through websites or blogs that are accessible to people at a time which suits them.
- On-line PB processes may encourage and give people a reason to develop or improve their IT skills.
- Digital may be more attractive to those who are tech savvy and otherwise may not get involved face-face.
- People may feel more confident to contribute and vote on-line (reducing intimidation or being blocked by gatekeepers) over face to face processes.
- Keeps people safe as you can't catch COVID on-line.
- Gives people the opportunity to have their voice heard and for communities to direct priorities.
- Digital communication may facilitate increased transparency and accountability at different stages and at the end of the process on what was achieved as it reaches a wider audience and over a longer timeframe in contrast to, say, a newspaper article or paper report.
- Can reduce overall cost e.g. room hire, enabling more resources to be allocated to the process.
- Opportunity for a cross-sectoral and regional approach to developing digital skills and support and training.

Challenges

- Digital poverty and lack of access to broadband, Wi-Fi or digital devices particularly for older people, vulnerable people, or rural communities.
- Low skills or confidence in digital processes may reduce participation.
- May present additional barriers or marginalise people with disabilities or those who don't have English as a first language.
- May lose the sense of community spirit in a digital process compared to an 'in-room' event.
- Concerns that the voting process could be manipulated.
- Glitches in technology when showcasing ideas could frustrate the experience or hamper conversations.

- May seem more competitive on-line as the sense of connection with and support for other groups may be reduced.

The second part of Kelly's presentation focused on how to support people to get involved in PB processes which have had to move on-line due to COVID-19 and outlined key considerations, process experience and making connections between PB participants. A recording of the Part 2 of the presentation is available on the PB Works Website.
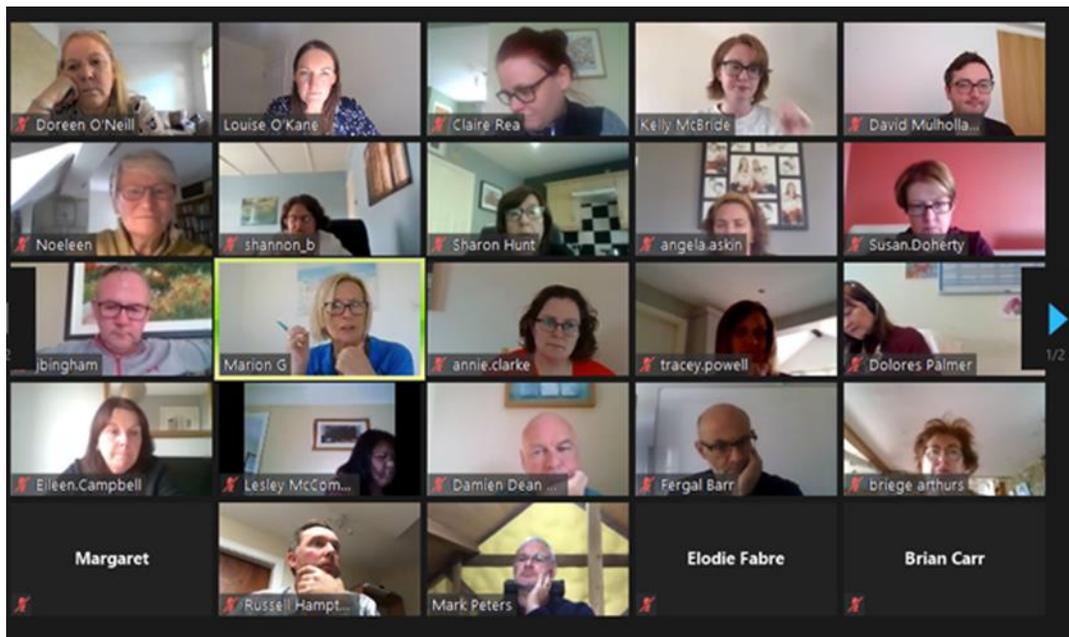
Snapshot of some of the participants at the Zoom-shop

A third poll was launched to determine plans for forthcoming PB processes across the region. Over a third of participants are currently considering developing a PB process; while 56% are either currently planning, delivering or moving a planned 'in-room' process online due to the impacts of COVID-19. Just under half of participants are concerned about the implications of further COVID-19 restrictions on their PB processes.

Poll 3: Are you considering or currently planning a PB process?

Considering developing a PB process	(10/29) 34%
Planning a PB process	(8/29) 28%
Delivering a PB process	(4/29) 14%
Moving a planned 'in-room' process online due to COVID-19	(4/29) 14%
Concerned about the implications of further COVID-19 restrictions on the PB process	(14/29) 48%
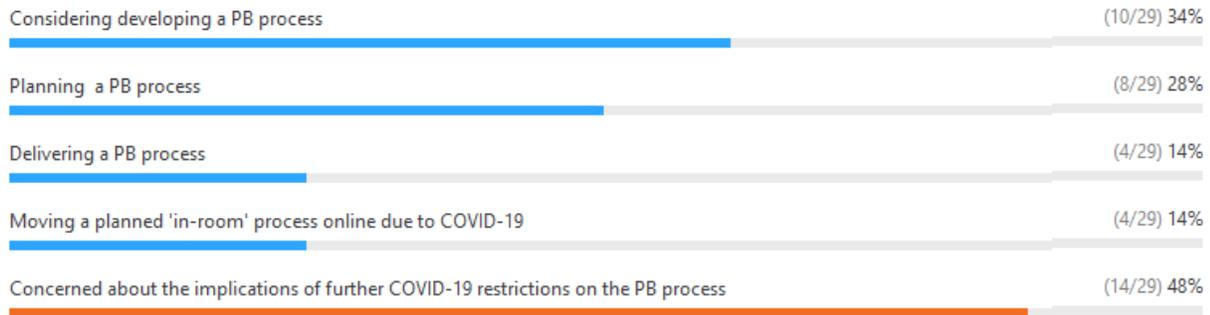
Participants were invited to present any questions or comments which they would like to share. Questions posed covered issues such as how do you encourage people to get involved and ensure participants are representative of an area; developing trust in the process; idea generation and making the case for your PB idea; measuring the success and social value of the process; and verification and validation of voting. A recording of the Q and A can be found here.

In drawing the workshop to a close Louise asked participants how useful they had found the session. An overwhelming majority of participants (92% - 22) found the workshop either 'Very Useful' or 'Useful'.

Poll 4: How useful did you find the Learning Workshop

Very Useful	(12) 50%
Useful	(10) 42%
Somewhat Useful	(1) 4%
Not Very Useful	(1) 4%
Not at all Useful	(0) 0%
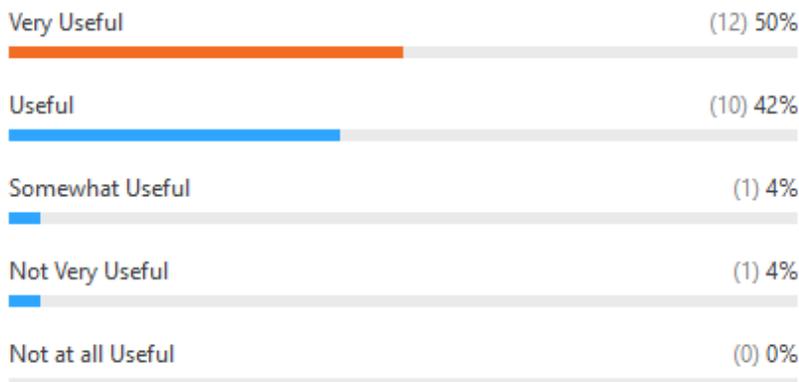
Thank-you and Close

Louise O'Kane thanked everyone for their participation and energetic discussions and noted that a report of the workshop would be circulated to all participants and made available on the PB Works website. She also reminded participants of the opportunity to sign up to the PB Works NI Network to receive information about upcoming events and to contribute to the development of quality PB across the region.

The workshop was brought to a close.

Appendix 1: List of Participants

First Name	Surname	Organisation
Breige	Arthurs	Forward South Partnership
Angela	Askin	Derry City & Strabane District Council
Robin	Baker	City of Durham, USA
Fergal	Barr	
Clive	Beatty	PSNI
James	Bingham	Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP
Eileen	Campbell	Armagh City Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council
Brian	Carr	Belfast City Council
Annie	Clarke	SHSCT
Jen	Cole	Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
Damien	Dean	Department for Communities
Noeleen	Diver	Triangle Housing Association – PB Works
Susan	Doherty	Derry City and Strabane District Council
Elodie	Fabre	QUB
Carol	Follis	Fermanagh and Omagh PCSP
Marion	Graham	Triangle Housing Association
Michael	Graham	Forward South Partnership
Russell	Hampton	PSNI – PB Works
Dan	Harris	Norwich City Council
Lisa	Harris	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Michelle	Hazlett	NIHE
Sharon	Hunt	Choice Housing
Kelly	McBride	Democratic Society
Angela	McCann	Lisburn & Castlereagh PCSP
Lesley	McCombe	Department of Justice
Margaret	McLaughlin	Habinteg Housing Association Ulster
Sean	McMonagle	Derry City and Strabane Council
Merényi	Miklóse	K-Monitor

Sam	Mitchell	Gosport community Safety Partnership
David	Mulholland	The National Lottery Community Fund
Louise	O'Kane	Community Places - PB Works
Doreen	O'Neill	Community Places
Dolores	Palmer	Department of Health
Mark	Peters	Community Volunteer – PB Works
Tracey	Powell	SHSCT
Claire	Rea	Community Places
Melanie	Rintoul	Radius Housing
Bridaine	Shannon	Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Apologies

Clive	Bowles	Portadown RFC
Karin	Eyben	Garvagh Development Trust
Sara	Houston	The National Lottery Community Fund
Sean	Keenan	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council
Jim	Labbe	PB Oregon
Claire	Lynch	Derry Strabane Council
Michelle	Markey	ABC Community Planning
Maurice	Millar	Triangle Housing Association
Fiona	McBride	FODC
Louise	McMahon	Health & Social Care Board
Jemma	Nurse	The National Lottery Community Fund
Brian	O'Neill	Enterprise NW
Denise	Smyth	Belfast City Council

Appendix 2 – Breakout Room Notes

Breakout Room 1

Notetaker: Mark Peters

Discussion Question: What are the opportunities and challenges of Digital PB?

	Opportunities of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	Training for people with low IT skills; having a reason (PB process) can encourage people to sign up for training
2.	Potential wider reach; physical space can limit numbers
3.	Easier to manage bigger numbers in digital process
	Challenges of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	Some people have no/low digital skills or no access to online
2.	Marginalised & vulnerable groups can be disadvantaged; e.g. BME likely to have smaller numbers in community so project may get less support
3.	Lose community spirit in a digital process compared to physical event
4.	Voting process could be manipulated
5.	Glitches in technology when showcasing due to different platforms, software incompatibility

Breakout Room 2

Notetaker: Noeleen Diver

Discussion Question: What are the opportunities and challenges of Digital PB?

	Opportunities of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	Accessibility increased as at a time that suits participants to dip in and not at a particular time and place as at a meeting.
2.	Ideas may be disseminated more widely, e.g. through a website or a blog that anyone may access at any time.
3.	May attract those who are tech savvy and who might not engage non-digitally

4.	Digital communication may facilitate increased transparency and accountability at different stages and at the end of the process on what was achieved as it reaches a wider audience and over a longer timeframe in contrast to, say, a newspaper article or paper report.

Breakout Room 3

Notetaker: Russel Hampton

Discussion Question: What are the opportunities and challenges of Digital PB?

Ask for someone who is willing to feedback either 1 Opportunity or 1 Challenge

	Opportunities of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	More people can take part.
2.	Less chance of being intimidated or swayed by others.
3.	You can't catch COVID online!!!
4.	People feel safer to speak online than in person. Get more involved.
5.	Easy access to funding. Low bureaucracy.
6.	Encourage new faces to take part in local community (as opposed to usual faces).
7.	More inclusive process. Possibly encourage more young people to get involved.
	Challenges of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	People might not have access to equipment or internet especially older folk or rural communities.
2.	Quality (of video connection) can differ. Can hinder conversation.

Breakout Room 4

Notetaker: Claire Rea

Discussion Question: What are the opportunities and challenges of Digital PB?

	Opportunities of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	It's a consensual process- Here's money what would you like to spend it on.
2.	In some PB processes experienced people are now limited with how many votes can have – only so many in a group allowed to vote if these are quite large on the day, so more equality across the voting.
3.	Allowing wider participation – Inclusive.

4.	Reducing the costs- resources can be better spent (rather than on physical venues and more being spent on the process).
	Challenges of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	Sometimes starts off with ideas but then moves to a competition. Weakens the importance of it. (if have big support and can get them there on the night then have more following in terms of voting).
2.	Those who don't have the skills or access to digital technology- limiting certain projects depending on key targets.

Breakout Room 5

Notetaker: Doreen O'Neill

Discussion Question: What are the opportunities and challenges of Digital PB?

	Opportunities of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	COVID has changed the way we work. Sector has embraced technology. Broader and wider engagement.
2.	The voting is more inclusive.
3.	We know who speaks on behalf of whom.
4.	More accessible – gives people a voice and identifies local priorities.
5.	Opportunity to use libraries, greater access to devises – to accommodate broader access and inclusion.
6.	Opportunity for a cross-sectoral and regional approach to developing digital skills and support and training.
	Challenges of Digital PB – Key Points
1.	Older people – not as accessible.
2.	Disabled and vulnerable people – their voices need to be heard.
3.	Ensuring people have access to get involved with PB. .
4.	Trying to get ideas depends on access to devices.
5.	Language barriers – ethnic minorities.