Practical Standards for Community Development and Empowerment

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1. Introduction

Why are practical standards needed?

The revised National Occupational Standards for Community Development (CD NOS) across the UK were published by Lifelong Learning UK in July 2009. They are available at www.fcdl.org.uk/NOS. This was the third five-year version, and major effort went into revising and updating them.

As the only formulation of community development which is part of an official national learning system, the CD NOS are a useful instrument for showing funders and employers that CD is an authentic occupation with approved standards.

The CD NOS are, however, in our view, too complicated for practical purposes, and include a number of questionable statements. This PACES paper offers a simplified set of statements which we feel lend themselves to practical planning and public dialogue. At the same time, the set of statements set out here are also wider in scope, as we believe there is a need for CD to reach out to encompass other areas of community empowerment more fully.

Aim and scope

This set of statements has no official status. It is issued for voluntary use or discussion. We have aimed to include the most essential components, not all possible ones, and would expect in time to revise the document, so we are keen to receive any comments.

Many of our statements are parallel to some of those in the CD NOS, though we have far fewer (about 115 as opposed to over 600). However, these statements are neither a summary nor a selection from CD NOS. Where they do correspond to CD NOS statements they are written in simpler form. We have also drawn on other sources, in particular the learning scheme presented in *Empowerment Skills for All* (ESA), published by the Homes and Communities Agency in 2009 (also downloadable on the PACES website). One key difference is that so far as possible our statements each cover just one point, aim to be mutually exclusive, and build up step by step from simpler to more complex elements.

The aim is that these statements will underpin the core knowledge, skills and practice required for effective development and empowerment work with communities.

The structure of the practical standards

For the practical standards we use a 'bottom to top' framework of natural progression based on *The Community Development Challenge* (CLG, 2007).

This consists of a set of steps which proceed transparently in breadth. Starting (similarly to NOS) with basic concepts, values and aptitudes, it then builds through:

- understanding localities
- bringing people together in community groups
- supporting single community groups

- helping many community groups and representatives
- helping public agencies understand and work with communities and community groups
- managing CD and helping other workers contribute to CD
- facilitating partnerships and coordinating CD across a neighbourhood or locality.

In a real neighbourhood or other local area all these would be taking place at the same time and by a variety of pathways for different people. Hence the need for higher levels of CD skills such as coordination between different CD inputs at different levels, and ultimately strategy across a neighbourhood.

This sequence of steps is the most natural pathway of skills development for individuals. It makes sense as a training and learning pathway because it proceeds from the simplest CD tasks to the most complex, each following on naturally from the ones before. And each step has worthwhile outcomes in itself, which are stated at the top of that step.

However, the sequence need not be followed rigidly if for a particular individual there are natural jumps from an earlier to a later step. But in such cases the 'skipped' steps should be filled in at another time if the aim is to achieve a full set of CD skills.

This set of steps also lends itself to helping community activists (i.e. voluntary workers) enter the CD profession. The NOS make no distinction between the role of community activists and professional community development workers. We see a fundamental difference in accountability and breadth. Community activists are likely to have helped or led a community group, to whom they are accountable. Moving from working with a single group to a variety of groups, and from leading a group to facilitating others to lead groups, is often the threshold between activism and the professional role. There is then the major added element of accountability to a funder or employer. The aims and values remain the same but the processes, legitimacy and potential for strategy are substantially different. These affect the level and content of the skills, how they are brought together and the organisational context of the work.

Relationship between community development and empowerment

A strong view emerging from the *Empowerment Skills for All* (ESA) report was that CD does not in practice cover the whole scope of empowerment. Yet ideally CD leads on to community empowerment, and the later stages of the practical standards merge into a strategy for empowerment across a whole neighbourhood or locality.

The term empowerment is used in many contexts. It is often used to mean assisting individuals to gain a sense of control over their immediate circumstances. It is important to stress that *community* empowerment means, in addition, people gaining the power to act *together* to improve their *shared* circumstances. This entails not only personal growth but gaining strength from each other and exerting influence on the larger, more corporate forces that shape our circumstances, in particular local public and private bodies. This direct influence and involvement is the essence of participatory democracy.

Community empowerment is therefore both about boosting the internal strengths of local communities and about the interface between communities and public authorities, services and governance. The improvement and management of neighbourhoods and localities is necessarily a shared enterprise between local residents and the whole landscape of local public and private bodies.

This level of activity is vital for making the idea of the 'big society' work (see the PACES paper on that). Whilst the big society tends to be seen in terms of a public service being 'taken over' by local communities, numerous examples show that what actually works - and actually produces economies - is residents' organisations and public bodies (and where possible private bodies) working together. This approach, sometimes called co-production, is what reduces crime, reduces isolation and depression, improves educational attainment, improves health and all other factors (see the Health Empowerment Leverage Project). It is this approach which therefore offers genuine economies in public services, as well as greater democratic energy.

Some commentators assert that community development covers all the skills needed for community empowerment. We have no problem with this in principle but it does not overcome the fact that in practice there is little guidance, training or theory for practitioners, in the NOS or elsewhere, on the wider, more strategic levels of this field. Elements of strategy are included in the new NOS but not very strongly or visibly. There is little about coproduction or the shared management of localities More of the items in the later sections of these practical standards are therefore based on *Empowerment Skills for All*.

Standards to guide empowerment should themselves feel empowering, and we don't think this is the case with the CD NOS. They are baffling to many practitioners because of the sheer number of statements they contain, a structure which does not have a transparent logic, and lack of clarity of some of the statements. This would be even more daunting to activists or to

novices seeking to enter the profession, or to workers in other professions seeking to make a contribution to this practice.

Much of what we see as unnecessary complication appears to stem from a view that the CD values – equality, social justice, collective action, learning and empowerment - are the structural basis for the standards and also need to be repeatedly invoked in individual statements, even though they have been stated as fundamental at the start.

We agree that the values are integral to the whole field. But they are not unique to this field and do not provide a structural basis for practice. We think it is clearer to base structure on the distinctive *techniques* of CD, moving from simpler to more complex as it grows in geographical scale, from support for individuals and single community groups to strategies to encompass relationships between the whole sector of community groups and the whole range of public agencies across a local area.

CD has had a longstanding difficulty in explaining itself to 'outsiders' – policymakers, funders, other professions and indeed communities themselves. In our view attempts to use the CD NOS as the explanation, or as the basis for professional qualifications and evaluation systems, would reproduce confusion. The practical standards should help to make CD more transparent, show how it leads to empowerment, better management of localities and a deepening of democracy, and thus enable it to take its place as an essential and permanent instrument of policy.

PRACTICAL STANDARDS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT

Step one: Understand the basic concepts and values of community development and the necessary aptitudes to carry it out

Main outcome: Demonstrate grasp of community development principles and possession of the personal aptitudes needed to carry it out

1   Grasp the basic principles of:
   1   equality and anti-discrimination
   2   social justice
   3   collective action
   4   community empowerment
   5   working and learning together   [NOS 'values']
   and
   6   democracy

2   Understand that community development is the development of community
   activity (based on the six principles), not the development of a fixed entity
   called a community. [*Measures of Community,* Home Office and Community
   Development Foundation, 2004]

3   Ability to work with residents of all backgrounds

4   Ability to empathise and communicate with people in different situations and
   roles and with people from different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs

5   Understand the support needs of people lacking confidence or conditions to
   participate in community activity

6   Ability to work with people who are under stress from a harsh local situation

7   Understand the tensions and stresses that sometimes arise between different
   groups of people in a locality

8   Ability to see the commonality of issues and problems across individuals'
     situations and concerns

9   Ability to identify residents capable of taking up common issues positively and
     encouraging others

10   Ability to work with local politicians and managers

Step two: Understand localities

Main outcome: demonstrate grasp of how localities work as a combination of human and institutional factors

1   Understand the range of public agencies that serve a locality

2   Understand what local public bodies do and how they are governed

3   Understand how to access data about localities

4   Understand the composition of the local population in demographic terms

5   Understand the importance of independent community groups

6   Understand differences of culture between community groups and professionally-led voluntary organisations

7   Understand the variety of community groups, networks and voluntary organisations within a locality

8   Understand the range of policies that impact on community life

9   Understand how inequality and disadvantage impact on community life

10   Understand the impact of transient and changing populations on community life

11   Understand the importance of diversity and equality of opportunity in a locality

12   Understand causes of conflict within localities

13   Understand how the different levels of local, national and international government decision-making affect community life

14   Understand the contribution of social movements and community action in
      bringing about change

Step three: Help people find common cause with others

Main outcome: new community groups formed, previously inactive residents take part in community activity, residents extend their social networks and gain confidence about taking up local issues

1   Help people express their needs, interests and concerns

2   Understand what attracts people to community activity and what puts them
      off

3   Bring people together to discuss their interests, needs and concerns

4   Understand and provide the different kinds of communication and access that
      people may need in order to participate with others

5   Use people's experience as the starting point for activities and learning

6   Help people identify potential areas for shared aims and activities

7   Support people to participate in discussions and decision-making

8   Work to ensure inclusion of excluded and marginalised people in community
      discussions and activities

9   Use community activities to share ideas, skills, knowledge and experience

10 Design activities to help people identify shared issues and explore possible
      solutions

11 Understand issues that people take up with public service workers

12 Identify and help meet the learning needs of people engaged in community
      activity

Step four: Help single community groups

Main outcomes: Community groups are more effective, more residents involved, residents gain new skills and wider social networks, groups are better resourced, groups gain influence on local decision-making, groups increase contact, credibility and cooperation with public agencies

1   Understand how community groups function

2   Encourage open debate within groups

3   Provide support for key individuals, to develop the necessary skills and confidence to enable the group to function

4   Build the confidence, skills and independence of the group

5   Help group members to agree aims, objectives and actions

6   Support groups in planning activities

7   Help groups to identify their members' expertise

8   Assist groups to attract new members and give them roles

9   Assist groups to relate to the wider community

10   Combat discrimination and prejudice within groups

11   Support groups in dealing positively with tensions and conflicts

12   Show groups how they can raise money either through grants, contracts, fees
       for members or users, or independent trading

13   Help groups to understand the requirements of funding bodies

14   Support groups' resource and financial monitoring

15   Assist groups to identify who has the power and influence in the locality to
       make the changes they want

16   Assist groups to identify potential allies who can help and support them

17   Support groups to use media effectively to make their voice heard

18   Help groups to evaluate their actions and results

19   Help groups to be aware of policies and initiatives that may affect them

20   Help groups become autonomous and independent of the practitioner

Step five: Help a variety of community groups, advocates, champions, and representatives

Main outcomes: multiple benefits flow to other residents from groups' increased level of activity, groups further strengthened by cooperation with each other, more assertive as a sector, achieve greater influence and secure better resources.

1   Facilitate contact between groups to share ideas, experience and practice

2   Foster a climate of trust and empathy between community groups

3   Support groups in working together

4   Assist dialogue, cooperation and negotiation between community groups and
      across networks

5   Help community groups link in to neighbourhood partnerships, area forums and
      local strategic partnerships

6   Show how anchor organisations and other local infrastructure bodies can help
      community groups develop

7   Support elected members in their role as community champions

8   Support community advocates or representatives on local strategic
      partnerships, forums and committees

9   Help strengthen local voluntary and community sector infrastructure

10   Seek to reconcile diverse groups who may be in conflict or competition with
      each other

11   Support community groups to play roles in planning, development and change
      in local services such as schools, housing, safety, transport, employment and
      welfare

12   Help groups develop productive relationships with local decision-makers such as
      councillors, managers, teachers, police, GPs and private sector professionals

13 Ensure that large voluntary organisations do not dominate smaller ones in

   networks

14 Encourage established communities and newer communities to work together

Step six. Help public agencies understand and work with communities

Main outcome: better relationship between public agencies and local residents, public services improved by better feedback from residents.

1   Map links between groups, activities and agencies in an area or neighbourhood

2   Help public bodies to understand and respond to the full spectrum of interests
      and needs amongst local people

3   Facilitate openness of public organisations to community influence

4   Understand the different cultures and complementary roles of community
      organisations and public agencies

5   Negotiate cooperative projects between community groups and public agencies

6   Help managers in public bodies develop an internal organisational culture of
      empowerment amongst staff and through them to local residents

7   Guide policies and processes in organisations to optimise engagement
      with communities

8   Assist public bodies to carry out their obligations to involve people in helping to
      shape their service and influence decision-making

9   Negotiate with schools, adult education centres, colleges and universities to
      provide education in active citizenship

10   Explain the contribution of community empowerment to the achievement of
      public organisations' objectives

11   Explain the scope for communities to influence organisations' decisions and
      methods

12   Help agencies create community engagement and empowerment strategies

Step seven: Manage community development and help other workers contribute to it

Main outcomes: Highly skilled and effective delivery of community development across a locality by the combined roles of specialist staff and appropriate contributions from other staff

1   Establish strategy, framework and objectives for community development in a
      given local context

2   Draw up specifications for community development staff and recruit them

3   Establish team and individual action plans

4   Manage and support staff through supervision, learning, development and team
      working

5   Establish continuous staff training and learning system

6   Guide staff in how to ensure that the most marginalised people are reached

7   Understand and explain relevant official indicators and statistics, how to access
      them and how to make use of them for community development

8   Assist workers to see the community potential in issues raised with them by
      residents

9   Establish system for evaluating and reporting on CD actions

10   Identify and promote examples of good CD practice

11   Understand the perspectives of other professions and occupations which
      interact with the community

12   Promote the role of CD and empowerment amongst other departments and
      partner agencies

13   Provide information to other occupations about communities within a locality

14 Assist professional agencies and front line workers to see how the impact of
    their service is experienced by residents

15 Assist workers to respond positively to issues raised by service users and draw
    out implications for collective solutions

16 Assist other agencies and departments to see trade-offs and mutual gains
     between empowerment and their existing objectives

17 Provide information and support to assist staff in other occupations to engage
    with and help empower communities

Step eight: Facilitate partnerships and coordinate CD across a neighbourhood or locality

Main outcome: Multiple improvements to a locality and the lives of all its residents, greater effectiveness and efficiency of all contributing agencies and satisfaction of professional staff and community activists.

1   Take a holistic view of local development

2   Think and work at both operational and strategic levels

3   Understand the different forms of wealth that go to make up a locality, both
      material and human, and from the public, private, voluntary and community
      sectors

4   Envision wide local improvements in both material conditions and relationships
      despite a multiplicity of existing problems

5   Create and transmit a vision of long term improvement for the locality

6   Negotiate commitment and cooperation from senior officers, politicians and key
      community activists

7   Understand how partnerships work, their advantages and limitations

8   Understand professional and organisational cultures and boundaries

9   Understand the distribution of power in organisations

10   Understand the unequal power relationships that can exist between public
      bodies and community groups and how to overcome this in working together

11   Understand the dilemmas faced by public agencies in balancing their primary
      responsibilities with partnership commitments and contributions to community
      empowerment

12   Identify economies and efficiencies produced by community empowerment

13   Produce a business plan for community development and empowerment across a

neighbourhood or local area

13 Apply theories of organisational change and development

14 Design and facilitate neighbourhood management partnerships genuinely driven
    by local residents

15 Develop a range of coproduction activities and projects between community groups and public and private agencies

16 Draw together evidence and experience from a variety of agencies and
    viewpoints and feed it into renewed vision for continuing improvement.

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