

Public Participation Network Structural Review Feedback Template

Further to the publication of Mazars [Structural Review of the Public Participation Network - Report](#), the Department of Rural and Community Development is eager to hear the views of all Public Participation Networks, the CCMA, Local Authorities, host organisations and other relevant stakeholders on the report.

We want to work with you to prioritise recommendations, to address any gaps and to develop an implementation roadmap to guide any changes that may be made to how PPNs are structured. The process will not be limited to the recommendations made by Mazars in the structural review report, but will also be open to further ideas and recommendations prompted by the report and by your own experiences.

In advance of a webinar on the Report which is due to be held in September, we would be most grateful if you would share your feedback on the report. This will be used to structure the webinar, so that the discussion can be directed to issues which PPNs and other stakeholders feel are most significant.

We are therefore requesting written feedback from PPNs, the CCMA, Local Authorities, host organisations and relevant stakeholders on the recommendations made in Mazars report, any gaps which the report does not address, and any other issues of concern which you would like to raise.

We would also be grateful for your initial thoughts on implementation, for the roadmap which will be developed to guide action on strengthening the national Public Participation Network structure in the coming years.

We have set out some questions below to gather your input. We would be grateful if you would take time to consider the content of the report over the summer and return your feedback by email to the Department at PPN@DRCD.gov.ie, by Wednesday, 31 August 2022.

Section 1. Your views on Mazars Report and Recommendations

Following the publication of Mazars [Structural Review of the Public Participation Network - Report](#), the Department of Rural and Community Development is eager to hear the views of all Public Participation Networks and other stakeholders on the report.

A. General feedback

1.1 What is your broad feedback on Mazars Structural Review of the Public Participation Network - Report?

Overall, the review captures the structure and history of the PPNs well. However, it appears to fail to understand that the PPN is a bottom-up structure and that this very aspect requires a clear definition, a wider understanding and support.

The Galway Co PPN suggests that PPN structures need to be involved in decision-making in broader ways not just through SPCs.

Overall, the review presented as is, is not accessible, ie the writing is too small, paragraphs are too long and the ink is in light grey.

The Review, at times, remains vague in its Recommendations.

The Review is long, it was felt that this was too much to ask community groups to read all- a summary is missing.

Overall, the review is **'inward' focused**. Ie, looking at flaws within the **internal** structure of the PPNs for its flaws. However, the PPNs have repeatedly reported that they encounter the main issues and barriers to development when dealing with

external stakeholders. I.e. The PPNs are not fully understood by key partners within the LAs, agencies and others.

The review does not capture that the PPN is flawed primarily by the imbalance in the level of compliance, governance, and mandatory reporting on the one hand, and the fact that the PPN is essentially a group of volunteers held together by a small team of 1 at most, 2 workers, on the other hand. For it to function at the level the DRCD wants it to, and to achieve the level **of formality** the DRCD requires, the PPN structure needs more investment.

The review fails to address the PPNs obvious limitations adequately, in that they rely totally on volunteers to achieve its main aim of community representation in local government decision-making. This makes it difficult to get consistent engagement and results as volunteers, quickly lose confidence in the structure when they realise the 'promise' of policy impact is an empty one; they are often busy and non-committal or there is a high turn-over. The review does not capture how volunteers often feel separate to other members of the SPCs as they do not receive the same welcome/respect that CLLRs or LA staff do. The review does not address the specific dynamics operating within the SPCs in any detail.

The review also fails to report on the fact that volunteers often lose interest and become disillusioned as they feel they cannot achieve any change, in a lengthy, complex process of policy change/impact. This results in a tendency to disengage or leave the post after a few months. The review does not mention this shared concern across all PPNs that volunteer representatives see little policy change and are disappointed by the limited impact they can affect and thus often choose to leave the role.

The review fails to capture the sentiment amongst the PPNs that members of the LAs do not fully understand or regard the PPN as a legitimate representative structure.

The reputational risk for the DRCD mentioned on page 18 stems from the fact that the PPN structure and knowledge thereof is not mainstreamed across Government. Other Departments (eg Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) must be involved in PPN mainstreaming.

Simple tasks must be approved and recommended at National level, to raise awareness of PPNs locally. For example, that the PPN represent to the Council PLENARY at least once per term.

Additionally: All government consultations must come to the PPN. We often find out about important, relevant consultations far too late or after the deadline.

The review fails to address the concern that the PPN mandate overlaps with many other agencies tasks and programmes. This leads to an identity crisis within the PPN (PPNs end up organising 'coffee mornings', memorial walks, or other community events that are not part of its representative, informative or capacity building remit), as well as 'project creep' whereby the PPN ends up taking on roles that they are outside of its objectives.

The PPN has an identity crisis- its identity needs to be defined better, beyond the vague principles and the 'culture' of PPNs listed on page 21.

On Page 28 the review addresses the issue with the College structures in a very confusing manner- it is not evident what the problems with the College Structure are and the recommendation is confusing. It is unclear what the 'barriers to participation' has to do with the structure.

The recommendation to 'improve diversity and inclusion' is difficult for a PPN to do when there is a lack of diversity amongst groups simply because there is no funding available for such groups to operate in a consistent and sustainable manner. Is the PPN tasked with addressing this gap by becoming the organisers of these groups? The

review must clarify the role here. The PPNs aim is to reach out and look for such groups should they been in operation, but should they/can **run** the groups?

Civil society organisations need better investment. The provision and funding for LGBTQI support structures and migrant representational structures, for example, is lacking and piecemeal.

1.2 Are there areas that you think are important but which were not addressed by the report? If so, please give detail

SWOT analysis mentioned on page 13 but only Strengths are listed- Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats missing.

Staffing: Resource Workers have issued repeated concerns and challenges they face in the role and even submitted a collective report detailing essential requirements to address these. This document does not seem to have been included in the Review.

The review does not address the key role the secretariat plays in the functioning of the PPN. This role includes being a key part in the day to day management of the PPN and its volunteer base. Compiling the annual report and signing off on it. Also, in the formulation of the Workplan, as well as, the organisation of the plenaries and implementing the decisions of the plenary. The secretariat is also tasked with the management of the co-ordinator and administrator in the day to day running of the PPN.

It has to be remembered that the PPN has grown in numbers by a factor of 4 since 2014. On that basis we must be going something right. We see groups registering throughout the year and not just for grant purposes. They value the information training and support we give them, and we hope to do things better with updated policies and procedures to ensure good governance of the PPN.

1.3 *Is there existing good practice in particular areas that could serve as a model for addressing any of the findings in the report?*

All agencies outside of the PPN that it works with are functioning well, but the PPN needs its own clear role and tasks.

Community Call during Covid ran well.

1.4 *Do you have any other ideas or want to raise any other issues in relation to Mazars Report?*

Essentially, the PPN is a **representative structure**, 'aimed to give the community a **voice**', yet this is its weakest aspect.

It is imperative we find ways in which the representative function of the PPNs is established further. Reps often report that Local Authority staff do not understand the PPN or their role and thus do not respect them. Additionally, occasionally, elected members/ CLLRs find the PPN representative as superfluous or a threat.

B. Feedback on Recommendations

1.4 *Which three recommendations in the report do you think should be prioritised as the most urgent to address?*

3.2.1.1. Communication structure-

Beyond a communication structure, a PPN wide **communication strategy** would help build the PPN brand and visibility and lift its profile- give it an identity.

Communication & Engagement must be top down too- ANY and ALL consultations from Depts must go directly the PPNs via automated notifications, for example.

3.3.2.1. strengthen relationships- this is too vague, it is imperative to the functioning of the PPNs that they get training- this must be done by their (SPC) committee and at the same time that new CLLRs get training too- this will benefit the relationship between PPN reps.

The way SPCs are run must become more formalised and meaningful. SPCs need to have dates agreed, clear training given to all new members, minutes and reports available in time.

Salesforce mentioned a lot too! Salesforce is very confusing and needs to be simplified, ie this functions removed that are unnecessary.

3.4.1.1. developing a PPN Way-

Very useful to get standardised policies across all PPNs to avoid duplication. The policies in the PPN Handbook, such as the 'Vulnerable Adults Policy' urgently require review/updating.

PPNs need to be involved in making these policies collaboratively.

1.5 Do you think that a central coordination structure, set out in section 4 of the report, would be beneficial to PPNs?

If so, which of the three recommended options do you believe would be most suitable?

If not, please provide your views as to why not

Option 2 sounds optimal- creation of the PPN WAY- Branding- defining what the PPN is.

Option 1 is too little support/change and Option 3 is too much!

None of the Options however address the problem of duplication- the PPN still doesn't have an exact identity, it hasn't carved out its unique role. It is about representation, but reps are not 'elected members like CLLRs'.

Amongst our colleagues from GRETB, Volunteer Galway and SICAP and Rural dev Companies, etc.. it is still unclear to all what our exact purpose is, even amongst CLLRs and LA staff- and PPN Reps and members themselves! **This is why the representative purpose, the PPNs main task, must be realised and made more meaningful.**

1.6. Did you identify any areas which you feel were not addressed in the recommendations made in the Report? If so, please share your recommendations in this regard

The **relationship** between certain stakeholders is not addressed specifically. To make the PPN function, the PPN Reps need to be acknowledged and respected. How can PPN Reps represent community voice when they don't know where to take that voice and how to influence policy- they are not given the opportunity to influence policy.

1.7 Do you have any other feedback on the recommendations made by Mazars in the report?

Section 2. Your input on the Implementation Roadmap

A working group, representative of key stakeholder groups, will be established to develop a roadmap to guide implementation of the recommendations in the Mazars report and any additional recommendations that stakeholders agree on during consultation. We will seek members for the working group in due course.

The Implementation Roadmap will be used to guide action on strengthening the national Public Participation Network structure in the coming years.

2.1 What is your broad feedback on the areas that should be included in the Implementation Roadmap?

The Tracker/Dashboard system has yet to be tested. Perhaps too reliant on quantitative data.

The actual/qualitative impact PPN Reps are having re influencing policy should be mapped out/included.

2.2 What issues do you feel should be prioritised in the Implementation Roadmap process?

Moving away from relying (so heavily) on volunteers must be added.

Making the PPN a meaningful representative Structure should be a priority.

Roadmap must clearly state timelines and ownership of Tasks. Also capturing data beyond KPIs.

Roadmap should clarify review timelines and who has access to it?

2.3 Did you identify any issues that should be considered as part of the Implementation Roadmap that were not included in Mazars Report? If so, please provide further detail

Public responses, attitudes, awareness, understanding towards and of the PPN system should be added.

Perhaps include an 'Ideation Box' ie a process by which the general public at any time can submit ideas or feedback about the PPNs. This way perhaps quite novel and useful ideas can be captured.

2.4 Is there any other feedback you wish to share on implementation or any issues which you wish to raise?

The Irish Government has adopted the PPNs as its primary way to achieve **participatory democracy** across Ireland. The importance of this process can not be stressed enough. **Therefore, it is vital that the profile of the PPN as an instrument of democracy is elevated so that it receives the recognition it requires to function effectively.**