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COSLA

# Democracy Matters Community Engagement Fund 2023 - 2024

Facilitation Guidance  
Holding a conversation in your community

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## Introduction

Impact Funding Partners is managing this fund on behalf of the Scottish Government and COSLA.

Following a highly inclusive process of engagement with communities in 2018, the Democracy Matters Community Engagement Fund has developed into phase two. Phase one showed that different places and diverse communities work best when they have local control and influence over decisions that affect them most.

People are involved in different communities in countless different ways. Whatever community means to you, we would be delighted if you decide to bring people together to start a Democracy Matters conversation. This guide has information to help you make that happen. It offers practical advice on how to host a community conversation on the future of local democracy, how to use the supporting Democracy Matters material and how to send us your views.

This document provides a great way to resume or join the conversation. We hope that communities will decide to be part of this important next step and once again decide to have local conversations across Scotland.

Three quite different fictitious communities are described in the Phase 2 documents and how each established new decision-making arrangements that were best for them. These three examples are not options which you have to choose between. Instead, they are designed to help bring to life your conversation about the type of ambitious new arrangements which could help your community to thrive. We know people identify with communities of place and of interest. We hope that the three fictitious examples demonstrate the relevance of the questions in the themes and questions document to everyone, no matter where they live or what makes the biggest difference to their life.

## When should we have the conversation?

People from a wide range of backgrounds took part in the first part of the conversation and told us they enjoyed being part of the process. We are keen to hear even more voices as people come back together to consider a different democratic future for their community.

You have until February 2024 to submit your views. We recognise that people are busy, and some communities will wish to have in-depth discussions over one or maybe more sessions. We want your community to contribute as fully as it would want, and hope that you will decide to start planning your Democracy Matters conversation as soon as possible.

## How do we start a conversation in our community about Democracy Matters?

If you need some money to hold a Democracy Matters conversation, small voluntary organisations and community groups can apply to the Democracy Matters Community Engagement Fund 2023 - 2024. Information about the fund, supporting documents and a short application form are available at <https://bit.ly/DM23-24>.

Grants of up to £300 are available to cover the costs of holding a community event to discuss Democracy Matters. These costs could include overhead costs, the hire of a venue, publicity, printing out the information material, transport to the venue, verbal translation services, facilitation costs, food and refreshments, organising a crèche: whatever you need to help you hold a successful meeting at which all members of your community can take part.

However, even if you are not eligible for funding, you can still host a conversation using the information provided and feedback to the Scottish Government. You can do this either as a group of people, or as an individual who is keen to be involved.

## What information will help guide our conversation?

You might consider showing this short [animation](#) which provides an overview of what communities told Scottish Government was important to them during the first part of the conversation and also explains why we are inviting people to join this phase of the discussion. Other supporting material includes an overview of phase two of the Democracy Matters conversations in easy read, BSL and Gaelic translations available on our webpage. Additional translations of the supporting documents can be made on request by emailing [democracymatters@gov.scot](mailto:democracymatters@gov.scot).

We encourage you to consider how best to share some or all of this material in advance so that everybody can understand what the discussion is about before attending the event. You can find further guidance on inclusive communication here: [Inclusive Communication Hub](#). Also, if you are facilitating for the first time you may find some of the phrases [here](#) useful in keeping the discussion moving and ensuring everyone gets to speak.

## Where should we hold a community conversation?

A conversation could be held anywhere where your community feels comfortable. Think about choosing a venue that will allow as many people as possible to take part, and try to consider:

- Accessibility for people who are wheelchair users, or people who find walking difficult.
- Facilities for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, like a PA system or induction loop.
- Provision for care givers to attend with children where no creche is being provided.

## How long should the conversation last?

This is up to you and your group. We are asking for people's views across a range of related issues which people identified as being important. However, it is perfectly acceptable if your group does not feel able to answer every question in the discussion document.

The time you need will also depend upon the needs of the people who are participating (e.g. British Sign Language [BSL] or translation requirements) and how many are involved. You could choose to spread the conversation out over a few shorter sessions. Prior to your conversation you might also ask participants if there are questions which they would like to spend most of their time together discussing.

You may also find it useful to set an agenda for your conversation. Below is a typical agenda you could use for your own conversation:

1. Welcome and introductions.
2. Discuss and agree 'rules for a good conversation'.
3. Dedicated time to view and/or read the discussion document and supporting materials.
4. Group discussion on each of the Democracy Matters questions.
5. Close the meeting and thank everyone for coming.

## What should be agreed for a good conversation?

It is helpful at the start to agree a set of 'rules for a good conversation'. You might prepare some suggested rules before inviting the group to agree and add to them. These could be displayed and referenced throughout the conversation. Some example rules might include:

- Respect everyone's right to speak without interruption.
- Be aware of how long and how often we speak.
- Listen to what other people are saying.
- Speak for ourselves – 'I think ...' or 'I feel ...' rather than for others - 'everyone knows...'.  
'everyone knows...'
- Don't make personal attacks or put-downs.
- Don't use language that could be offensive.

## Do we need other equipment or material?

If you wish to run your conversation digitally, using a platform that can use whiteboard tools like Microsoft Teams can be useful. You could also use online whiteboard tools such as [Google Jamboard](#) or [Miro boards](#). However, what is most important is having someone to record your group's views in any way which you are most comfortable so that you can share these with us.

If you plan to use an online whiteboard or other digital collaborative tools, it is best to build in enough time to confirm everyone has access and is comfortable with how to use them.

## What would help guide the conversation?

When running these conversations, it's important to keep everyone involved and feeling like their participation is meaningful. Workshop type activities like the ones below can help with this and keep conversations on track. These are just suggestions and may not suit your community or your time constraints.

**Brainstorming** – As your group works through each of the questions in the discussion document, you might ask people to share their ideas as soon as they come to mind. A scribe can add them to a flipchart or whiteboard which everyone can see. The scribe might then group similar ideas together for everyone to then consider and review.

**Visioning** – You could ask members of the group to take a few minutes on their own to visualise what their community could look like in the future. Finding common elements in different people's ideas might help to find unifying goals. A shared vision for the future of your community can be a good starting point before answering the questions in the discussion document.

**Mapping** – You could start your conversation by inviting people to identify local resources, such as community-based organisations, local skills, and knowledge, planned projects, green spaces and buildings which might be put to use. This would allow the group to create a map of these assets using coloured post-it notes and pens to refer back to when considering the Democracy Matters Themes and Questions which can be found on our webpage: <https://bit.ly/DM23-24>

**Consensus Decision Making** – You may wish to reach agreement in your group in a way which doesn't rely on voting for each idea. Instead, your group could commit to finding solutions that everyone actively supports or can compromise on. This method can help you arrive at more rounded conclusions which do not go against the wishes of anyone. This [video guide](#) explains how to run a session based on the values of consensus and inclusivity.

## How can we send the record of the conversation to the Scottish Government?

The main, and preferred method of submitting your responses to the questions is through the online response form that can be accessed here [consult.gov.scot/democracy-matters](https://consult.gov.scot/democracy-matters).

Your answers should be submitted directly to the Scottish Government, and should not be sent to Impact Funding Partners.

Submitting your feedback online is the preferred and encouraged method, but for some people, this may not be possible. If you would prefer, you can also submit your response by email to the Scottish Government at [democracymatters@gov.scot](mailto:democracymatters@gov.scot).

Please email [democracy@impactfundingpartners.com](mailto:democracy@impactfundingpartners.com) and you will be supplied with a word document to email straight to the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government will be bringing together the results of all the conversations across Scotland. It will be helpful if your submission is structured in a way which makes clear which question(s) you are responding to. We hope this guide has been helpful and we look forward to what the results of your conversations can do to help transform the future of local democracy in Scotland.



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