



Participatory Budgeting: A draft national strategy Giving more people a say in local spending Communities and Local Government

A response from the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS)

June 2008

Introduction

1. The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) is the independent voice of the voluntary youth sector in England. A diverse network of over 170 national voluntary youth organisations and regional and local youth networks, NCVYS has been working since 1936 to raise the profile of youth work, share good practice and influence policy that has an impact on young people and the organisations that support them.
2. The NCVYS network reflects the diverse range of voluntary organisations working with young people at community, local, regional and national level. Most of our members offer opportunities to engage in challenging activities or develop creative talents. They also support young people to become active in their communities and offer opportunities for their voice to be heard. Some offer interventions to prevent or tackle specific issues such as homelessness or offending behaviour. Others offer counselling, advice, guidance and information. All contribute to young people's personal and social development; some also engage with spiritual development.
3. For more information on any element of this paper, please contact NCVYS's Policy Officer, Hannah Dobbin on 020 7278 1041.

Key Comments

4. NCVYS welcomes the opportunity to engage with the development of participatory budgeting¹. This response highlights key issues that are particularly pertinent to the voluntary and community youth sector (VCYS).
5. NCVYS welcomes the move towards involving young people in participatory budgeting, in particular the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and Youth Capital Fund (YCF)², as it gives young people a valued opportunity to make decisions about what services they receive. Communities and Local Government (CLG) can learn from the work that the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has done in this area. In particular, NCVYS welcomes DCSF's intention to expand participatory budgeting through its target to involve young people in the decision-making of 25% of Local Authorities' (LA) youth services budget. NCVYS encourages CLG to continue to work with other government departments to ensure that government takes a joined-up approach to participatory budgeting.
6. NCVYS feels that government could be more ambitious with targets for youth-led participatory budgeting and should remember that young people are not restricted to only using youth facilities and services. Young people also access generic services, such as health, and should be given the opportunity to be involved in decision-making in these areas.
7. As highlighted in the consultation document, community engagement in spending decisions at a local level is crucial if services are to respond to the needs of the local population. The VCYS plays a key role in engaging young people in their communities and in policymaking. Government should work with VCYS infrastructure organisations and networks to communicate and engage young people, and the smallest VCYS organisations, in participatory budgeting.
8. NCVYS supports Participation Works' response which reinforces many of the points that follow.

CLG's work streams and actions

9. CLG has set out five work streams to fulfil its ambition for participatory budgeting in all Local Authority (LA) areas by 2012:
 - promoting awareness;
 - developing more participatory budgeting pilots;
 - producing guidance materials;
 - working with government departments on applying participatory budgeting; and
 - evaluation and research.

¹ <http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/>

² <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthfund/>

10. Although it is evident that VCYS, and more broadly community, involvement is paramount to CLG's work streams there is little mention of the role of the voluntary and community sector in the strategy. A voluntary and community sector work stream would demonstrate government's recognition of the importance of the sector and would also make it clearer to the sector that it needs to be involved.

Recommendation 1: Government to introduce a voluntary and community work stream into its participatory budgeting strategy.

11. We are also concerned about ways in which VCYS involvement can be facilitated effectively. A key role of infrastructure organisations, such as NCVYS, is to provide information, advice and guidance to its members³. VCYS networks can be an effective mechanism for government to promote awareness of its strategies and the impact that they will have at a local level. National infrastructure organisations, such as NCVYS, have a wide reach and similar support organisations exist at a local level, e.g. Council for Voluntary Youth Services (CVYS). This broadens the VCYS's reach and enables communications to access small, local voluntary organisations.
12. Feedback from NCVYS events has highlighted the VCYS's appreciation of practical seminars where participants have been able to directly communicate with government officials. The Participatory Budget Unit should deliver, or work in partnership with the VCYS to deliver, practical seminars that include VCYS participation. A focus on LAs at regional level will miss out on vital engagement with the VCYS and the potential to reach community groups and young people.

Recommendation 2: Government to work with the VCYS to communicate and disseminate information about participatory budgeting in order to reach the smallest community organisations and most disadvantaged young people.

13. CLG highlights the intention to work across government departments to embed community empowerment. In particular NCVYS welcomes the focus on youth services and the importance of working with DCSF. DCSF briefing highlights the link between their policies and the CLG community engagement agenda in *Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund Delivery Guidance*⁴.
14. NCVYS understands that the YOF and YCF are not included in the target of young people being involved in decision-making for 25% of LA's budgets for young people's services by 2018. Assurances from government that this is the case would be well received by the VCYS.

³ See NCVYS's response to the DCSF *Call for Evidence – Youth Sector Support Arrangements*, Appendix 1 *Research and Literature Review*. Available via:

<http://www.ncvys.org.uk/index.php?page=600>

⁴ <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthfund/>

Recommendation 3: Government to clarify that the YOF and YCF are not included in the target of young people being involved in decision-making for 25% of LA's budgets for young people's services by 2018.

Engagement of LAs and the VCYS

15. As with many current government initiatives, such as *Aiming high for young people: a ten year strategy for positive activities*⁵, the participatory budgeting strategy is a national plan based on local implementation. To ensure effective local delivery central government needs to successfully engage with both LAs and VCYS organisations to enable effective and meaningful participation to take place.
16. It is unclear from *Participatory Budgeting: A Draft Strategy* how its implementation will fit within Local Area Agreements and Children and Young People's Plans.

Recommendation 4: Further guidance is needed on the practical implications of participatory budgeting that is clear to all involved, including the VCYS.

17. To facilitate engagement of young people and their organisations, especially those from the most disadvantaged communities, government needs to use effective communication techniques. As previously highlighted local infrastructure organisations, such as CVYSs, have strong links with communities and local organisations. These links provide access to small voluntary organisations who are often working with the most disadvantaged young people.
18. Government needs to show that young people's, and VCYS organisations', participation in budgeting is valid and effects outcomes. Any feelings of tokenism by the VCYS or young people need to be dispelled. Transparent processes need to be in place that provide participants with feedback about the difference that their contribution has made.

Recommendation 5: Government to ensure that participatory budgeting processes are transparent and show that input by young people or the VCYS makes a difference to communities.

19. Government should support LAs to share examples of good practice that show the effective engagement of young people in participatory budgeting. VCYS infrastructure and organisations are another mechanism through which to share good practice and LAs should utilise this to reach communities and encourage greater public involvement in decision-making.

⁵ <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/youthmatters/aiminghigh/>

20. VCYS already has expertise of participatory budgeting, e.g. YouthBank⁶, which is an established initiative run by young people, for young people. YouthBank emerged from the VCYS and is now facilitated by LAs in many areas. This is an example of how VCYS expertise can be used to inform the development of participatory budgeting in other areas and facilitate cross-sector partnerships.

Recommendation 6: Government to work with VCYS infrastructure and networks to learn from, and promote, examples of good practice.

Young people's participation

21. It is firmly established that youth participation should feature as an integral part of work within the youth sector. The VCYS leads the way in youth participation with many organisations and partnerships existing to support the development of youth participation within and outside of the voluntary and community sector. Participation Works⁷, of which NCVYS is a partner, leads the way in developing youth participation and supporting organisations and young people in this area.

22. It is important to remember that young people do not only use facilities labelled 'youth', such as youth centres. Young people also access other public facilities and services, including health centres, drop-in centres, transport and parks, and should be given the opportunity to be involved in decision-making around the allocation of budgets for these services.

Recommendation 7: Young people to be included in all community decision-making processes, not just those that effect youth services.

23. Government is supporting youth participation and the role of LAs in giving young people the chance to be involved in participatory budgeting. The details of participatory budgeting are being developed; however, NCVYS and its members, like the Local Government Association, believe that government could be more ambitious with their targets.

Recommendation 8: Government to set more ambitious targets for youth-led participatory budgeting.

⁶ <http://www.youthbank.org.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.participationworks.org.uk/>

Conclusion

24. Participatory budgeting is a positive step towards community involvement in decision-making at a local level. The VCYS can offer support, access and networks that can help government achieve meaningful community engagement. Young people are being given opportunities to contribute, namely through the YOF and YCF, but targets around this need to be more ambitious and open to areas outside of youth services. Government needs to recognise and support the strength and skills of the VCYS to encourage engagement at a local level. It is often small, local VCYS organisations that work with the most hard-to-reach young people who should be given the opportunity to be involved in participatory budgeting. NCVYS is keen to continue to be involved with the development of participatory budgeting and build on already established relationships with government.

The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services
3rd Floor
Lancaster House
33 Islington High St
London N1 9LH
T: 020 7278 1041
F: 020 7833 2491
W: www.ncvys.org.uk
Registered charity no. 1093386
Registered company no. 4385383