



Local Strategic Partnerships

What is it?

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are made up of representatives from local authorities, health, police, local business and the voluntary and community sector. LSPs are the key mechanism for:

- Producing Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS)
- Developing and delivering Local Area Agreements (LAAs)
- Determining local priorities
- Determining where the majority of the local funding will go.

How does it work?

Local councils are expected to play a leadership role in LSPs – initiating and maintaining momentum and ensuring appropriate representation across the sectors.

LSPs typically have a central board or executive, where key decisions are made, and a range of other themed groups which feed into this central board, such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). LSPs can determine their own structure and community engagement mechanisms, which must include engagement with the voluntary and community sector. Many LSPs have a VCS representative on their board. There is usually some sort of selection process by voluntary and community organisations to choose the VCS representatives on LSPs and themed groups. Some LSPs have a women's forum, to provide a mechanism to hear local women's voices.

To help the VCS engage with LSPs, the most deprived 88 areas developed their own local Community Empowerment Networks (CEN) seven years ago. CENs bring together a range of organisations – from large 'professional' voluntary agencies to the smallest community or residents group. They are responsible for getting information about LSPs out to all sections of the community and for providing ways in which people most affected by poor service delivery can influence how the services should be changed.

However, despite the current emphasis on empowerment and community voice, many CENs are struggling to survive or have already ceased to operate. Urban Forum surveyed 79 CENs in 2008 and found that since the introduction of the new LAA funding, 18% of CENs had lost their funding, and 22% had lost part of their funding.

Why is it important?

Engaging with LSPs is crucial – they determine what issues are important locally and what services should be prioritised and, therefore, funded.

Most women's organisations are not engaged in any formal way with their LSP. Research by WRC, Urban Forum and Oxfam found that only 1.8% of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) representatives on LSPs were women's organisations – despite making up 7% of the VCS.

The research also found that even where there was representation of women (generally) on LSPs, they were not necessarily champions for gender equality or women's services. This makes it even more important that women's organisations are involved.

Many women's organisations lack the capacity to engage, and some have experienced frustrating barriers to participation e.g. the time and energy needed to be part of the LSP mechanism, lack of understanding of gender inequality and discrimination by LSP partners etc. WRC are about to start research to explore what factors are needed for women's organisations to successfully be able to engage and influence locally.

What can I do?

Contact your LSP VCS representative or CEN: Find out how you can get involved in the LSP and themed groups, and where the best opportunities for influencing are. Also, the VCS representative or the CEN is your representative, so don't be afraid to hold them to account! You may even consider being the VCS representative on the LSP or themed groups yourself!

Join or start a local or regional women's network to feed into your LSP: Your influence will be greater if you work with others. You could request that representatives from the LSP meet with the network on a regular basis so that the LSP (or themed group) can more effectively address gender equality issues.

Have a look at your local policy: All public bodies, including your local council, PCT, police, etc, should make their Gender Equality Scheme publically available. Ask them what evidence they used and who they consulted, to arrive at their local priorities. Ask to be consulted on the next scheme (it has to be re-done annually) to feed in local gender equality priorities.

Your LSP also develops the Sustainable Community Strategy (which outlines priorities for an area) and the Local Area Agreement (which sets targets that local area will meet). Look at what the local priorities and targets are, and how gender equality and your work fits into these targets. What evidence do you have to argue for funding under the current targets? What evidence do you have to argue for new priorities and targets in the next round of your LAA, to meet the needs of local women?

Where can I get more information/support?

Your **local infrastructure organisations**, umbrella bodies and second tier organisations (such as your Council for Voluntary Service (CVC), Rural Community Council (RCC), equalities networks and forums etc) are likely to be working on, or know about, Local Strategic Partnerships:

- www.navca.org.uk (to find the details of your local CVS)
- www.acre.org.uk (to find the details of your local RCC)

The **Women's Resource Centre** can provide practical help and advice on influencing Local Strategic Partnerships, and our Stronger Together project supports the development of women's networks.

- www.wrc.org.uk

See Oxfam, Urban Forum and Women's Resource Centre (2007) '**Where are women in LSPs**' for more information about women's marginalisation in LSPs:

- www.wrc.org.uk/resources/wrcs_research_and_reports.aspx

WRC will be starting a major **feminist participatory research project in 2009**, working intensively with a number of women's groups across the country to explore how they can better engage with their LSP and influence local priorities. If you are currently working with your LSP, or would like to, get in touch with Darlene Corry, Policy Officer at darlene@wrc.org.uk.

Department for Communities and Local Government information about **LSPs**:

- www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/performanceframeworkpartnerships/localstrategicpartnerships/

Urban Forum is the umbrella body for community and voluntary groups with interests in urban and regional policy, especially regeneration. They produce policy briefings on a range of issues including LSPs and have done **research into funding for community empowerment networks**:

- www.urbanforum.org.uk
- www.urbanforum.org.uk/pdf_files/community%20empowerment%20network%20cen%20research%20report%202008%2004%20.pdf

To find out about **your LSP**, go to your local council website, or ring your local council.