

Meath Public Participation Network

Communications Policy

Approved at meeting of Meath PPN Plenary held on 14th May 2024



Líonra Rannpháirtíochta Phoiblí An Mhí
Public Participation Network Meath

Foreword

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 restructured the relationship between Local Communities and Local Authorities and between Local Authorities and Local Communities. The Meath Public Participation Network is a formal network created with the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The Meath PPN is the main link through which the Meath County Council engages with the local communities in the county.

The participation of all citizens in public life and discourse and their right to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities is at the centre of democracy.

Meath Public Participation Network (MPPN) is committed to having an effective communication policy to support both internal and external stakeholders and recognises the importance of this document in guiding effective and positive interactions between all parties.

Our Communications Objectives:

- To facilitate effective communication between community groups and the local authority in line with the objectives of public participation policy & law
- To establish the PPN as the primary communication channel between Meath County Council and Meath Communities
- To build capacity in members group through the communication of training programmes and networking opportunities available
- To enable people, groups, and organisations, within the community and voluntary, environmental and social inclusion sectors, to give voice to a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system.
- To enable people, groups, and organisations, within the community and voluntary, environmental and social inclusion sectors, to participate in policy making and oversight activities through the governance systems of the PPN and linkage group structures
- To strengthen the ability of people, groups, and organisations to contribute in a positive way to their community.
- To support networking, connection and collaboration amongst member groups
- To act as an information hub for local community and voluntary, environmental, and social inclusion groups and organisations

General Principles

- All members of the MPPN are encouraged to communicate with other members of the MPPN in a cordial, supportive manner.
- Any communications should take place during appropriate times. For clarification, Meath PPN insists on 9AM – 9PM as appropriate. Right to disconnect will be adhered to.
- The format for some communication may vary to suit the needs of the target groups or individuals.
- PPNs are apolitical organisations. MPPN Representatives and Secretariat members may not use membership to promote party political messages.

- In all communications, members should not disclose any personal or confidential information.
- In all communications, members should not share information or make comments that could be considered inappropriate, offensive, or defamatory.
- All formal correspondence must be sent to the Co-ordinator for recording and for distribution to the Secretariat, as appropriate.
- In all communications, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a key consideration. For further guidance please see MPPN Data Protection Policy.

Internal Communication

Stakeholders: Plenary – Secretariat – Representatives – MPPN Staff

Purpose: This section relates to communication between internal stakeholders within MPPN

Communication Methods

The Plenary is made up of all the registered member groups of MPPN. The MPPN will communicate with all member groups through, but not limited to, the following methods:

- Plenary meetings
 - Direct mails
 - E Newsletters
 - Formal consultation
 - Social media posts
 - The MPPN Website
- In most cases, the Secretariat will communicate with the Plenary through the above-mentioned methods via the Staff.
 - Member groups should communicate with the MPPN in the first instance by contacting the MPPN Coordinator.

Secretariat

- The MPPN Secretariat meets throughout the year as agreed by Secretariat members.
- All Secretariat meetings are documented and minuted, recording the decisions of the group and are posted to the MPPN website in a timely fashion.
- Members of the Secretariat should not use membership of the MPPN to make enquires or make observations on other MPPN groups or County Council matters.
- The Secretariat operates as a flat structure.

Representatives

- Representatives are elected to act for MPPN and its member organisations.
- Representatives are required to communicate with each other and their respective linkage/thematic groups in advance of committee meetings and/or Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) meetings. The purpose of these communications is to agree the way to best pursue the objectives of MPPN and its members. Representatives should remain focused on the committee or SPC workplan and agenda. Disagreements, differences of opinions should be discussed in advance of committee/SPC meetings and must remain internal to the MPPN.
- Representatives are required to submit a short, written report following each committee meeting. The format for this report is available through the Co-ordinator.
- Representatives must take part in Linkage Group meetings and may agree on additional communication methods for example via group email.
- Linkage Group reports are published by the Coordinator to the MPPN website.
- Meath PPN Co-ordinator is the primary contact for all Representatives

The Media

- Before speaking to media on behalf of MPPN, Representatives or Secretariat members must seek approval from the Secretariat.
- In the course of day-to-day work, the Co-ordinator will draft and release press releases and other routine media communications.

Social Media

Social media can be used in a positive way to highlight the work that the PPN is doing, as well as being useful for supporting member group activities. In referring to the PPN via your own social media, the following points should be taken into consideration.

- Check the accuracy and sensitivity of what you are posting before pressing submit.
- Confidential information relating to the PPN work must not be published online.
- Be respectful of others' views and opinions.
- Try to add value to the work and ethos of the PPN where appropriate, and reflect the inclusive ethos of the PPN.
- Do not use ethnic, religious or discriminatory comments, remarks or slurs, insults or obscenities.
- Do not engage in conduct that would be viewed as unacceptable online, e.g. cyberbullying.
- Share information that you know to be true, be careful of fake news.
- MPPN Social media accounts are managed by the Administrator and Co-ordinator
- Requests to post content on social media can be submitted to meathppn@meathcoco.ie for consideration.
- No member organisation, Representative, Secretariat member, staff member or other person or organisation associated with MPPN shall post negatively or irresponsibly about MPPN.

CONFIDENTIALITY

For the MPPN, openness, transparency and democratic processes are core values. During the course of their work with MPPN, Representatives, Secretariat Members, and staff may at times become privy to information that is confidential to the organisations they represent, or even personal in nature to the individuals engaged with MPPN. In such instances, all parties are required and expected to treat that information with the utmost respect, consideration, and confidentiality. Breaches in confidentiality, will be treated with seriousness and may be subject to complaint or grievance in line with the MPPN Grievance and Complaints Policy.

Examples of confidential information may include:

- Individual statements or opinions expressed during MPPN meetings. In minutes the group decision will be reported not the general discussion.
- Any issues concerning employment including salaries and / or salary scales.
- Information relating to groups or individuals in the area that is not in the public arena.
- Disciplinary, grievance and/or complaints issues.
- Personal difficulties that either voluntary members or staff may be experiencing.
- Any internal difficulties within the MPPN including disagreements or difficulties between individuals within the MPPN, Secretariat members, other volunteers, or staff.

Complaints and Grievance:

Any complaints or grievances arising from communications activities, either internal or external, involving any stakeholders operating under this document, will be dealt with in line with the MPPN Grievance and Complaints Policy.