

Are you gearing up for Big Society?

A new two day facilitation package from iCoCo will help local authorities and their partners understand what the Big Society means, whether to engage with it and how to do so.

Facilitated in your locality, the **Gearing up for Big Society rapid action** package will provide a conceptual challenge based upon real practical issues in your local area.

It is also an opportunity for you to inform Central Government what Big Society means for you and to help shape the agenda.

Why our independent Big Society challenge?

Organisations and individuals will either like it, loathe it, or may wait to see what happens. Even so, the Big Society idea is being rolled out and hardly a day goes by without some new dimension being unveiled. So, we need to ask ourselves some challenging questions:

- Many local authorities have been encouraging citizenship and volunteering over recent years, so how is the Big Society different?
- How can we genuinely help people do more for themselves, to create higher aspirations in poorer and disadvantaged communities that are often left behind while middle class areas traditionally get mobilised, taking advantage of the public services available?
- What is the role of other sectors, what should our local voluntary agencies and business partners be doing?

These are just some of the questions our **Gearing up for Big Society rapid action** will help you to provide the answers for.

Eric Pickles MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, says:

"Much of this will be done through our planned Localism Bill to devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions. It will help set the foundations for the Big Society by radically transforming the relationships between central government, local government, communities and individuals.

We've got to use this opportunity to usher in not just a shift of power but of culture...

And that means decentralising from Whitehall through the town hall, starting with individuals, families, communities and voluntary groups.

Asking those hard questions about whether we can shift power more directly into people's hands before we assume the state has the answer to their problems.

Because in the end, it's not really a matter of the centre letting go or councils taking the lead. It's not just a question of how much power can be shifted.

There may be sceptics who think that we're not serious or that this can't be done. We've already shown that we are deadly serious about localism. And we've proved how much can be done even in just a short time. With your help, there's a lot more to be done.

So, together, let's rewrite the rules."

What we can say about Big Society

There is no 'cohesion' without 'community'.

Our work with many local authorities and partners tells us that everyone is hoping to re-discover a greater sense of community spirit and togetherness in which people genuinely care about their local area and about each other. This may have been called social capital, capacity building, community development or something else, but there has at least been a common aim, shared by local partners across the board.

So can we harness your existing strengths and build upon them to face the challenges ahead that localism and extra powers and freedom will present, especially within tighter budgets? And does this mean thinking through new and creative routes of social enterprise that have not previously seemed possible?

Let's anticipate, plan and get ahead of the planned Localism Bill.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron MP, says:

“We’ve got to give professionals much more freedom, and open up public services to new providers like charities, social enterprises and private companies so we get more innovation, diversity and responsiveness to public need.

And... community empowerment...

We need to create communities with oomph – neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny, who feel if they club together and get involved they can shape the world around them....

To help them [4 vanguard communities], we will make available officials from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

If there’s a problem or obstacle or bureaucratic log-jam, they will be there, on hand, to help break them down and get things moving.

And we’ll also work with communities to help identify and fund a community organiser for each area...”

What we will do

This is available immediately – we have called it a ‘rapid action’ to enable you to gear up now and plan for the future.

A team of three people, two iCoCo senior practitioners and a Local Government Improvement and Development Councillor peer will spend two days communicating with people within your local authority/partnership area, to include your voluntary sector partners, social enterprises, businesses and community and resident groups.

The purpose is to help you define and consider:

- What does Big Society really mean in your locality? – drilled down to community levels
- What are you doing already that fits within emerging definitions of Big Society – and what does it mean to you?
- What aspects appear unacceptable in their present form – can these be changed?
- What do you need to do to make Big Society meaningful in your communities – how will what you do impact positively on community outcomes?
- Is the right infrastructure in place to encourage and enable social enterprise – how well placed are you to cut the bureaucracy?
- What are the blocks and barriers to achieving Big Society?
- How can you evidence your potential in order to attract funding and recognition?
- What do you want feeding back to Central Government (Communities and Local Government) to inform how it can support achieving Big Society?

Our approach

Our approach is based on building on your existing assets using critical friend peer challenge methodology, but with a difference. In part we want to help you self-assess where you already measure up to Big Society. More importantly, we want to help you to gear up for Big Society and be able to contribute to a national bank of emerging knowledge and experience about what Big Society means at local levels.

We will post good practice and the emerging definitions and practice on the iCoCo practitioner portal and feed back what you said to CLG.

How will ‘Gearing up for Big Society rapid action’ happen?

We will provide a suggested, but flexible, programme of interactions intensively carried out over a two day period of interviews, question and answer sessions and facilitated workshops or focus groups. Our facilitation methods will be simple, inclusive and to the point. Content will include our emerging understanding of Big Society (as it is being talked about and published and how it is interpreted and defined by Communities and Local Government) and we will gather and share information about how others are developing Big Society implementation models.

At the end of the first 1.5 days we will invite all participants and other stakeholders back to a final session to hear a presentation where we will reflect back your input from the meetings and focus groups. We will finish with creative discussions to help you go forward to plan for and implement Big Society.

With your agreement we will also input your feedback into a wider bank of definitions, ideas and plans to present to CLG – this will also include the issues that you identify as possible barriers to achieving what Big Society means in your locality.

What will it cost?

We are subsidising **Gearing up for Big Society rapid action** to be delivered on a cost only basis at your organisation or partnership for approximately £3,500 plus actual expenses.

Once you have signed up to **Gearing up for Big Society rapid action**, we will send you a guidance document that includes:

- A suggested programme template
- A focused and minimal document list for iCoCo pre reading
- A suggested list of stakeholders/participants and types of meetings
- Our facilitation approach and key questions to help you prepare
- Our expectations of your organisation and logistics

An iCoCo director or principal associate will telephone you to help scope out and tailor the two day programme.

Our expectations of you

In the main we expect you to arrange for the right people to be in the right places at the right times, so that as many of your local stakeholders as possible can be involved in this exciting process.

What you should do next

To arrange a telephone discussion and to book **Gearing up for Big Society rapid action** in your local area, contact our Director of Practice, Vanessa Walker:

Tel: +44 (0)7780 687383

Email: vanessa.walker@local.gov.uk

Institute of Community Cohesion,
Futures Institute, 10 Innovation Village,
Coventry Technology Park, Cheetah Way,
Coventry, CV1 2TL

For more information and to sign up to the iCoCo Network, visit www.cohesioninstitute.org.uk

*“The iCoCo offer **Gearing up for Big Society rapid action** is excellent value – we could send 6 or 7 people on a Big Society national conference for a similar cost – this way a lot of people in our area can get involved. If Big Society is about localism – we agree we should be talking about this locally – not in London conference halls.*

Even in hard times we think this is an investment in our future that we can ill afford not to do”.

Nicola Yates OBE – Chief Executive, Hull City Council

About iCoCo

The Institute of Community Cohesion (iCoCo) was established in 2005 to provide a new approach to race, diversity and multiculturalism. It is a not for profit partnership, which aims to build capacity at all levels and in all local and national agencies to promote community cohesion. iCoCo works to build understanding and awareness of the impact of increasing diversity on local communities, developing practical solutions to promote tolerance and respect across communities. iCoCo uses applied research to constantly develop practice and build capacity of the agencies and individuals involved.