16th AWARD BEST PRACTICE IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Application Form

PART 1: BASIC DATA

Experience data (complete the information below in a clear and concise manner)

Title of the experience: Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Making a Living Summit		
Name of the city or region: Waltham Forest (London)		
Inhabitants of the city or territory approx. 277,000		
Country: United Kingdom		
Institution presenting the candidacy London Borough of Waltham Forest (in partnership with Democratic Society)		
Website of the experience or institution: https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/council-and-elections/about-us/our-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-strategy		
Profiles in social networks of the experience or the institution: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQdxwvVc7dI** **https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=269405348645488** **https://www.facebook.com/walthamforestcouncil/videos/1039386383361797**		
Start date of the experience: June 2021		
End date of the experience Ongoing – July 2022		
Budget of the experience £240,000		
Type of candidacy (Mark with an X in the right column)	New experience	
	Innovation on an existing experience	X
	Continuity of an experience	
Type of experience (Mark with an X in the right column)	Participatory budgeting	
	Participatory planning	

(*you may choose more than one*)	Standing council	
	Workshop/meeting for diagnosis, monitoring, etc.	
	Public Hearing/Forum	
	Poll/referendum	
	Assemblies / Citizen juries / Deliberation spaces	X
	E-government/Open government/Digital platforms	
	Citizen initiative	
	Other (specify):	
Objective of the experience (Mark with an X in the right column) (*you may choose more than one*)	To achieve higher levels of equality in terms of participation	X
	Including diversity as a criterion for inclusion	X
	Community empowerment	X
	To empower non-organised citizens	
	To increase citizen's rights in terms of political participation	X
	To connect different tools of participation within a participatory democracy "ecosystem"	X
	To improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
	To improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy	X
	To improve the evaluation and accountability of the mechanisms of participatory democracy	
	To improve any public policy through the active participation of the public	X

Territorial area (Mark with an X in the right column) (*you may choose more than one*)	All the territory X	Local	
		Regional	
	District		
	Neighbourhood		
Thematic area (Mark with an X in the right column) (*you may choose more than one*)	Governance		X
	Education		X
	Transport		
	Urban management		
	Health		
	Security		
	Environment/Climate change and/or urban agriculture		
	Civic associations, grassroots and new social movements.		
	Culture		
	Housing		
	Job creation		X
	Decentralization		
	Local development		
	Training/learning		X
	Economy and/or finances		X
	Legal regulations		

	Social inclusion	X
	All	
	Other (write the topic)	
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) associated with the practice *Mark with an X in the right column (more than one option can be chosen)* *You can also add the specific target*	SDG 1 - No poverty	X
	SDG 2 - Zero hunger	
	SDG 3 - Good health and well- being	X
	SDG 4 - Quality education	X
	SDG 5 - Gender equality	X
	SDG 6 - Clean water and sanitation	
	SDG 7 - Affordable and clean energy	
	SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth	X
	SDG 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	X
	SDG 10 - Reduced inequality	X
	SDG 11 - Sustainable cities and communities	
	SDG 12 - Responsible consumption and production	
	SDG 13 - Climate action	
	SDG 14 - Life below water	
	SDG 15 - Life on land	
	SDG 16 - Peace, justice and strong institutions	X
	SDG 17 - Partnership for the goals	X

PART 2: DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

Fill in the following fields clearly and concisely. You can add links if you consider it appropriate.

Context

*In a **maximum of 300 words**, it presents the cultural, geographical, historical, institutional and socioeconomic context of the city, the territory in which the experience takes place.*

Waltham Forest is a borough situated in the North-East of London and is home to around 277,000 people. Waltham Forest has a young population, with 11% of residents aged over 65 compared (national average 18.5%). The borough is one of the most culturally diverse boroughs in both London and the UK. 32% of the population identifies as White British, with other large ethnic groups being White Other (20%), Pakistani (11.5%) and Black African (7.8%).

Waltham Forest is rapidly changing. In 2010, the borough was the 15th most deprived nationally, but by 2019 it had moved to 82nd most deprived. However, the median household income is £35,000, but average monthly rental costs are more than £1428, with house prices averaging £530,449. The unaffordability of housing, coupled with the rising cost of living is a challenge for many residents to make a good living.

There are roughly 2 jobs for every working-age resident of Waltham Forest. This low job density is a characteristic shared by neighbouring boroughs, with many residents working in central London. The job market in the borough has a greater number of lower-paid and unskilled jobs, with 40% of jobs offering below London Living Wage. There are relatively few large employers in the borough, with only 0.8% of businesses employing more than 50 people. A large majority (94.2%) of businesses in the borough are micro-businesses, employing fewer than 10 people.

It was evident that Waltham Forest is acutely impacted by the socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Unemployment rose sharply, and this disproportionately impacted groups who experience the greatest structural inequalities. As a Council, we committed to tackling the scale of structural inequalities that residents face in the borough when trying to make a good living through a participatory approach to solution-making.

Precedents

Explain the precedents and origins of the experience: if it is the innovation of an existing experience, what are its origins, if it is a new experience, what are the antecedents in participation in your city/municipality/region. You can also indicate if you have been inspired by experiences in other cities/countries. (***maximum 300 words***)

This is not the first participatory democracy event that Waltham Forest Council has undertaken. Before the pandemic, Waltham Forest hosted the world's first Citizens Assembly on Hate Crime, in partnership with Democratic Society (Demsoc) and Involve. The Assembly used a sortition process to identify 45 residents of Waltham Forest at random and invite them to take part in the Assembly, working together as a community to stop hate incidences and ensuring that everyone feels welcomed in Waltham Forest. Residents spent 5 days reviewing evidence and deliberating on recommendations for the Council to take forward. All participants were paid for their contributions.

The Hate Crime citizens assembly demonstrated to use the power of deliberative democracy and involving residents in decision making. Building on this, the Council again decided to partner with Demsoc to deliver a participatory democracy model based on community empowerment. Our EDI Making a Living Summit and strategy development built on this precedent of the Hate Crime Assembly to deliver a summit of residents reviewing how to tackle inequalities around making a living. Participants were brought together not through the sortition process of typical citizens assemblies, but from identifying appropriate stakeholders who had previously been engaged. This resulted in a blend of voluntary group representatives who work with people who experience the greatest inequality, and residents from these groups.

The EDI Summit empowered residents to make key decisions, with a commitment for all of their recommendations to be implemented by the Council in full, and work beginning on this immediately. This model was unique as it built upon best practice from previous deliberative democracy, expanding the model to one that works to empower the voices of residents who are most disadvantaged.

Objectives of the experience

What is the objective listed in Part 1 that you think is the most important, and indicate other outstanding objectives of the experience (***maximum 100 words***)

Including diversity as a criterion for inclusion is the most important objective listed for our project. The purpose of the EDI programme was to design a process with residents who were marginalised, and to then enable them through a process of engagement, deliberation and democracy, supported by experts, to create solutions for implementation.

Our key objectives were:

- Give power and influence to marginalised groups
- Empower voluntary groups to deliver their own participatory democracy through funding and capacity building
- Embed participatory democracy as a tool for engagement on key priorities for the Council – 'Nothing about us without us'.

Methodology

Describe the methodology of the experience: phases of the process, participation channels (***maximum 300 words***)

State of the Borough Report: Brought together all available quantitative data to demonstrate inequalities in Waltham Forest. Almost 100 sources were used, with 5 key themes formed. Making a Living was chosen as the priority area due to the socio-economic challenges presented by the pandemic.

Community conversations: With Demsoc acting as quality assurance, over 550 residents were engaged through over 400 hours of research to understand the lived experience behind the statistics in the State of the Borough, including:

- 20 voluntary-group facilitated workshops: Almost 140 residents who experience significant barriers to making a living took part to discuss the challenges they faced. Participants were identified by voluntary groups who support specific groups in the borough (e.g Project Zero for young people). The host organisations were given additional funding to support residents and implement solutions to the challenges raised.
- 13 ethnographic case studies: Ethnography had never previously been considered by the Council as a viable research approach. More than 5 hours was spent with each participant through detailed interviews, photo diaries and informal conversations to understand their stories.

Summit: 32 participants were chosen from both voluntary representatives and residents who had taken part in the Community Conversations. The safe space created enabled a group with complex needs to deliberate and find solutions to difficult challenges. The Summit took place over 3 phases:

- Learn: Understand the evidence base, key speakers, areas of innovation and debate the challenges raised around 4 themes
- Deliberate: Discuss over 30 potential solutions, supported by 8 expert practitioners (local businesses, HR experts, health services)
- Decide: Agree practical action and final 15 recommendations

Following the Summit, participants will continue to stay engaged by being part of working groups reviewing council processes and policies, working to re-design services to better suit vulnerable groups' needs.

Innovation

Explain what you consider most innovative in the practice. (*In a* ***maximum of 150 words***)

3 key innovations:

- 1st participatory democracy on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UK
- 1st participatory democracy in UK to work with already engaged actors, with the innovative engagement approach preceding it
- Ground-breaking pre-engagement with stakeholders who became participants in the Summit

As a process, the Waltham Forest EDI Making a Living Summit was the first of its kind in the UK. Building on traditional deliberative democracy, we instead worked with actors who were already highly engaged in the subject area, and more widely in their community. Whilst this created an initially hostile first day, ultimately the results of the summit, along with the feedback from participants, demonstrate how deeply they approached the issue of inequalities around making a good living and how important it is for the Council to give opportunities of this nature to the community.

Inclusion

Point out the importance of including as many groups and diverse populations as possible and how you have achieved it. (In a ***maximum of 150 words****)*

The nature of this work meant it was not right to sortition residents or include as many groups as possible. We focused on residents identified by our quantitative data as facing the most barriers to making a good living. These included Black men, South Asian women, young people, disabled people, migrants and LGBTQIA+ people.

Throughout the community conversations we focused on these key groups, with 20 targeted workshops led by voluntary groups who work with residents from these groups. The ethnographic research also focused on 13 residents experiencing multiple structural inequalities.

Our Summit focused on making sure the most marginalised groups were over-represented. Of the 32 participants, at least 3 were from every decadal age bracket (18-75), 1/3 were disabled, 1/5 were LGBTQIA+, 15 ethnicities were represented with an over-representation of Black and South Asian residents, and a mixture of employment statuses (Un/employed, retired, students, unable to work, self-employed).

Communication

What has been the strategy and communication channels of the experience so that the population knows about it and gets involved. (In a ***maximum of 150 words****)*

The purpose of this project was not to involve the whole community in the solution-making, and thus our communications have been tailored accordingly. By giving power and influence to those who historically have not had their views championed, our comms focused on engaging with residents from key target groups through the voluntary and community groups who supported the engagement.

Despite this, it was important we showed the whole borough why there is a need for an EDI Strategy. An animation was produced which included British sign language and subtitles for accessibility, to explain the project to all residents. This also encouraged residents to have their say through our digital survey. Videos taken from the EDI Summit event were also used on all of our social media channels to demonstrate to residents the work that has been happening around the Summit (here and here).

Articulation with other actors

It explains how the experience was articulated with different actors and simultaneous or pre-existing processes. What roles did these participants assume? Explain the degree of success of this joint. (In a ***maximum of 150 words****)*

The EDI programme involved a wide range of actors throughout the journey:

- Demsoc: Provided Quality Assurance throughout the engagement and designed and facilitated the EDI Making a Living Summit. This was a hugely successful partnership, with the Council and Demsoc now discussing formalising a working partnership for engagement moving forwards.
- 9 Voluntary groups: All groups were re-imbursed for their recruitment for, and facilitation of, workshops. Many became summit participants, voicing the issues of their groups, and have continued being paid by the Council to work towards solutions through the EDI development fund.
- Experts, testers and practitioners: A range of internal (Heads of HR, Adult Learning Service, Early Help) and external (business leads, health service leads, equalities experts) experts supported the summit participants to review evidence and build their ideas into recommendations. Experts will continue to support the implementation of the Strategy through an Advisory Board.

Evaluation:

What evaluation mechanisms have been implemented? Develop whether citizenship has participated in the evaluation of the practice (In a ***maximum of 300 words****)*

Evaluation continued at each stage of the programme to review, refine and improve. During the community conversations, Demsoc provided a role of quality assurance, attending workshops and reviewing surveys to evaluate the level of participatory engagement through the process. This led to alterations to the design of the workshops, and significant changes to the Summit design, including the key decision to include those who had previously engaged as summit participants.

The evaluation has formed part of the EDI Making a Living Summit report available on our website. This report was reviewed by participants twice to ensure that the evaluation accurately depicted their experience at the Summit. We measured a range of statistics, including comparison data from a pre and post event survey. This showed participants were more positive that the Summit was a beneficial, that they were able to influence decisions and that the Council would act on their recommendations after taking part. More importantly, the evaluation also showed positive change in the lives of participants, improving their mental health and self-worth, as demonstrated in the videos under the communication section.

The long-term action plan, to be delivered this Autumn, will be fully costed and contain SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound). Again, these will be developed with participants of the Summit, and be reviewed annually to measure progress against the 15 recommendations of the Summit.

Impacts and results

Describe the impacts and results of the process. How many people have participated, and which are their profiles. What have been the impacts on public policies, on the functioning of the administration and on citizens. (In a ***maximum of 300 words****)*

Through the whole process, over 550 residents were engaged in over 400 hours of engagement. Many of the 32 participants, who took part in the Summit came from the residents previously engaged, alongside representatives from voluntary and community groups. All participants were paid above the London Living wage for taking part.

For the participants, the Summit provided an opportunity to vocalise their experience and decide upon genuine change to the services they use and the area they care about. The 15 recommendations they decided upon, all of which received more than 80% support, have been fully adopted by Waltham Forest Council. This has galvanised the Council to review its existing provision, ensuring that these are joined up and deliver reductions in inequalities. A full review of the actions for each of the 15 recommendations can be found in the annex.

As well as the Summit, almost 150 people have benefited from the funding given to the voluntary and community groups. Projects have included providing tablets and digital skills training for 8 disabled residents and workshops with 45 young black men and women to support pathways into jobs.

Looking into the future, the success of the engagement approach has won the Council funding to deliver a similar engagement to tackle vaccine hesitancy. This will look at using voluntary groups to identify participants and run a series of workshops, building capacity in participants to support their communities to take increase vaccination rates.

In terms of how Waltham Forest Council operates, our new administration has committed to conducting more of our key corporate priorities through methods of deliberative democracy and increased community conversations. We are discussing with Demsoc the possibility of a formal partnership to continue working on innovative approaches to support marginalised residents to take an active role in democracy.

PART 3: EXPERIENCE SUMMARY

A summary of the experience: origin, objectives, operation, results, monitoring and evaluation (Do not hesitate to repeat aspects that have already been written before, this summary is the one that will be shared on the digital platform for open evaluation and in the publication of the award). (In a **maximum of 500 words**)

The events of the last two years have been stark reminders of the extreme inequalities that exist in society. Increased awareness of the impacts of racism through protests led by Black Lives Matter and the devastating and disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and has brought inequalities between different people and communities into sharp focus. Waltham Forest is no different. There are many in Waltham Forest, a very culturally diverse borough with 68% of residents from minority ethnic backgrounds, who face persistent and often insurmountable inequalities that affects the capacity to make a decent living.

In June 2021, we produced the State of the Borough report, a comprehensive evidence base of the impacts of inequality on the lives of the 277,000 residents in Waltham Forest. But quantitative data alone does not begin to tell the full story of the daily inequalities residents face.

The community conversations engaged over 550 residents through 400 hours of engagement. We used a multi-method approach to understand the lived experience of residents from marginalised groups trying to make a living in the borough. Over 90 separate challenges were identified by residents through workshops hosted by voluntary groups, who we supported with capacity building and financial support to encourage them to conduct their own workshops on other topics. Ethnographic research was also used for the first time.

The Summit brought was the culmination of a year long programme of participation to reduce inequalities, bringing together the evidence from the State of the Borough and the lived experience shared by residents in the community conversations. 32 participants from across Waltham Forest came together in-person over three summit days to decide how Waltham Forest should work to help residents who experience inequalities to make a living. Summit members were able to have constructive and informed debate to explore the issues together, to consider the trade-offs and hear other perspectives. Results of the summit, along with the feedback from participants, demonstrate how deeply they approach issues and how important it is for the Council to give opportunities of this nature to the community.

Through time spent learning, discussing, and deliberating together, summit members agreed on a set of 15 recommendations in total. Summit sessions were delivered in three phases:

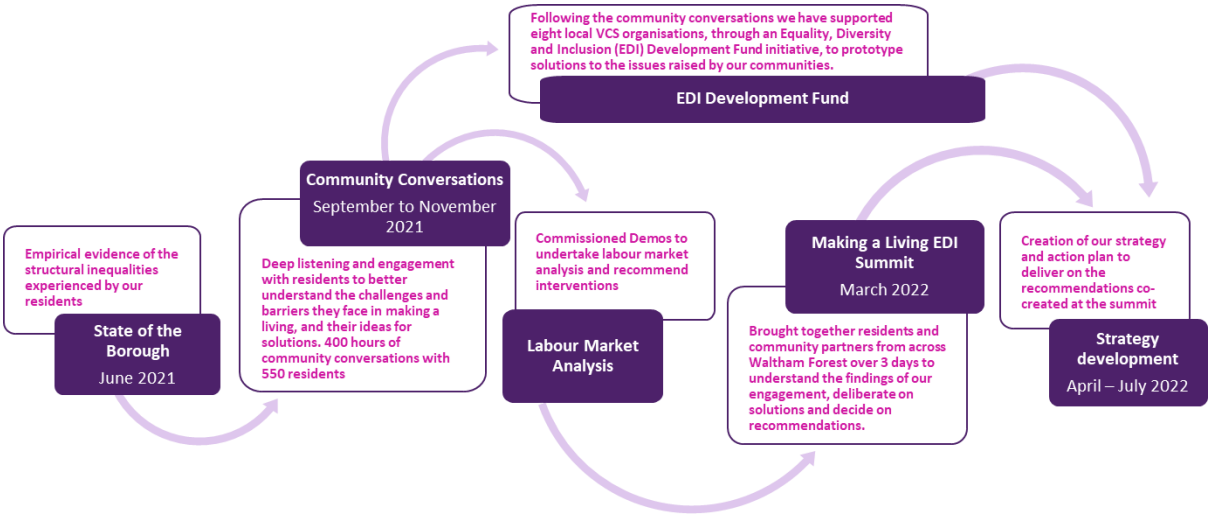
1. Learn – understanding context, challenges, and other areas of innovation
2. Deliberate – discussing potential solutions
3. Decide – agreeing practical action and recommendations

As a process, the Waltham Forest EDI Making a Living Summit was the first of its kind in the UK. The range of recommendations show that, when given the opportunity to deliberate with a broader group of people, with access to insight and information for discussion together in safe conditions, people from community groups and organisations can find solutions to some of society's most pressing challenges and produce detailed recommendations about a way forward.

We will continue to engage with summit participants as 'active citizens', contributing to positive change and future decision making as the recommendations are implemented.

We invite you to share annexes that allow you to better illustrate your experience: videos, photographs, documents... They can be sent through a heavy document delivery system such as WeTransfer, Dropbox or Google Drive

How we got here: Putting our communities at the heart of our approach



Vision Statements: What do participants want the borough to be like?

To make Waltham Forest a fairer and more equal borough, and support everyone to make a good living.	
Building inclusive workplaces	A borough that gives voice to marginalised and under-represented groups by working with charities and community organisations to support employers with creating welcoming, accessible and safe workplaces for all.
Developing good quality jobs for all	A borough where people's and communities' needs are understood and met, where all jobs and employees are valued and able to progress for the wider community to benefit in a holistic way, to enable greater economic development and social integration by meeting and matching the needs of businesses and residents
Learning, advice and skills support for those who need it most	A borough where no one is excluded from learning, advice and skills, goods and services, inclusive of IT skills or access, asylum seekers, race, gender, sexual orientation, housing status, language barriers, education level, age and disability – and understanding the purpose of businesses and services in the community.
Creating a caring and fair system	A borough where the leaders tackle the limitations and barriers, including for marginalised groups, to accessing support and creating an equal system from grassroots level.