



Civic University
Network



**Institute for
Community Studies**

Case Study:

Commission Model:

Learning from the Poverty Truth Commissions

Poverty Truth Commissions seek to ensure that those with lived experience of poverty are at the heart of decisions about how to tackle poverty. Commissions do this by bringing together these ‘experts through experience’ with civic and business leaders in a locality to build relationships and explore issues of poverty together.

There are a growing number of Poverty Truth Commissions around the UK, each of which have been facilitated by neutral organisations in their own town, city or region. The aim of the commission is to **develop a better understanding of the causes, experiences and potential solutions** to poverty in particular places. Commissions put local residents with lived experience of poverty at the heart of the process and bring them together with representatives from local businesses, councils and service providers to **facilitate honest conversations** about poverty and poverty reduction. These people are the **commissioners** whose job it is to define poverty in the area and create ideas for practical solutions. Commissions tend to run on an ongoing basis over a period of at least 1 year and are facilitated by a neutral party. This allows relationships, trust and mutual understanding to be built between commissioners. Commissions have been influential in shaping council policy, business practice and community initiatives in a variety of places in the UK, such as Salford, Leeds and Birmingham.

Relationships are key to the commissions’ work. In order to most effectively work together, it is vital that everyone involved is able to trust one another. That trust is gained through the building of relationships between people who wouldn’t ordinarily meet.

The Dundee Poverty Truth Commission

In Dundee, a Poverty Truth Commission held monthly **Poverty Truth Conversations** between those living in poverty and local decision-makers to explore different aspects of poverty & poverty reduction. In these sessions titles are left at the door and everyone meets as people,

not as professionals or service users. The concerns of those in poverty set the agenda for the group and sessions are designed to allow people to share their experiences openly.

Alongside these, **regular informal events** were held for people living in poverty to attend to share experiences with peers. These people were supported to be able to tell their story, discover their expertise and speak out. These events helped people to contribute to the commission.

A **Mutual Mentoring Programme** was piloted in which civil servants with responsibility for poverty reduction policy were mentored by people drawn from communities that have direct experience of poverty and inequality. The civil service mentees met with their mentors in their own communities. Visits were reciprocated with the mentors shadowing civil servants. The purpose of the pilot was to help policy makers better understand the realities of life for those who their policies affect.

People experiencing poverty were provided opportunities, and provide support to enable, to be present at a number of anti-poverty **events and strategic meetings** throughout Dundee and Scotland, to input their insight.

Working Groups of commissioners were set up to Commissioners to explore issues identified as being particularly pertinent for those involved in the Poverty Truth Conversations.

Civic Commissions...?

The commission model could be adapted for universities looking to develop their civic activity with their community. Commissioners could include university staff, students and representatives from the local community. Working groups could focus on priority issues and areas of mutual interest. Capacity-building and facilitation could be considered to allow for open and honest conversations. Local residents could be invited to internal events or sit on research assessment or procurement panels to share their insight.

Summary

Role of Community	Community as 'commissioners'- representatives of the community play a strategic and decision-making role, alongside representatives from local agencies.
Depth of Collaboration	High- based on building collective decision-making capacity of community representatives and local agencies. Places community voice at heart of process and gives it authority.
Lens	Approached through the lens of poverty and poverty reduction, but could be used for other issues or be more place-based?
Inclusivity	Aims to reach those who are 'experts by experience' and professional experts. Reach into community depends on resources available.
Data Generated	Qualitative data on lived experience; open and honest insights to shape more effective decision-making and service delivery.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Long-term relationship-building approach can recalibrate power relationships and alter forms of communication• Incorporates a range of methods to engaging with people and generating information• Collaborative approach to inquiry build capacity and allows for lessons to be learnt about new ways of working
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires skilled facilitation• How to ensure the participants represent the views and experiences of the wider community?• Requires investment in longer-term relationship-building• Takes time• Requires willingness to share responsibilities and decision-making- this may clash with established ways of doing things