

Application Form

PART 1: BASIC DATA

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

Title of the experience: Legislative Theatre for GM Homelessness Prevention Strategy		
Name of the city or region: Greater Manchester		
Inhabitants of the city or territory		
Country: England (UK)		
Institution presenting the candidacy (name of the municipality, department, government, institution leading the candidate experience): Greater Manchester Combined Authority		
Website of the experience or institution: https://streetsupport.net/greater-manchester/legislative-theatre/ Homelessness - Greater Manchester Combined Authority (greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)		
Profiles in social networks of the experience or the institution: Twitter: GMCA Greater Manchester Mayor's Charity		
Start date of the experience: 29 April 2020		
End date of the experience (if operational, indicate "ongoing"): 30 July 2021		
Budget of the experience (indicate the budget of the experience or the resources mobilized for its development and implementation): £22,500, plus in-kind staff support		
Type of candidacy (Mark with an X in the right column)	New experience	X
	Innovation on an existing experience	
	Continuity of an experience	
Type of experience	Participatory budgeting	

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(Mark with an X in the right column) (you may choose more than one)	Participatory planning	
	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): Legislative Theatre	X
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	
	Community empowerment	X
	To empower non-organised citizens	X
	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	
	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		

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

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	Legal regulations	
	Social inclusion	X
	All	
	Other (write the topic)	
<p>Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) associated with the practice <i>Mark with an X in the right column (more than one option can be chosen)</i> <i>You can also add the specific target</i></p>	SDG 1 - No poverty	
	SDG 2 - Zero hunger	
	SDG 3 - Good health and well- being	X
	SDG 4 - Quality education	
	SDG 5 - Gender equality	
	SDG 6 - Clean water and sanitation	
	SDG 7 - Affordable and clean energy	
	SDG 8 - Decent work and economic growth	
	SDG 9 - Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	
	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	

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	SDG 17 - Partnership for the goals	
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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.

Greater Manchester is a region of 2.8million people, with a rich history of industrial revolution, progressive politics, and radical new music.

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is regional form of governance that holds both devolution powers (since 2014) and also provides a mechanism for collaboration and partnership across Local Authorities and beyond (building on work since the 1980s). The GMCA pioneered the Integrated Model for Public Service Reform as a blueprint for transforming public services to work best for people. A major theme in this blueprint is empowering community assets and ensuring a preventative approach.

As 10 years of austerity combined with regional deprivation in the North, the homelessness and rough sleeping situation in Greater Manchester reached a critical point in 2017 with nearly 300 people sleeping out on any given night. With the election of the first Greater Manchester Mayor in 2017, ending rough sleeping became a city-region priority.

The Greater Manchester Homelessness Prevention Strategy – which triggered the work within this application – is a result of 4 years working in the crisis and emergency space to reduce rough sleeping, and an acknowledgement of learning and wider systems changes required to reach the goal of ending it, namely, through a preventative whole system approach.

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**)

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Legislative Theatre (LT) is an innovative participatory democracy tool using theatre to engage community members alongside policymakers in shaping policy decisions. Created in Brazil in the 1990s by the activist, local councillor and director Augusto Boal, and popularised in New York City since 2012, LT brings residents, policymakers and advocates together into creative, constructive dialogue, and offers a rigorous and fun testing space for new policy and practice.

In LT, a group of residents who are directly impacted by a specific policy / social issue create and present original plays based on their experiences: in the case of this project, addressing barriers in homelessness and housing services. Local audiences - made up of peers, lawyers, policymakers, advocates and neighbours - are invited to iterative public events, where they engage in dialogue about the human impact of broken or insufficient policies; improvise alternative responses to these problems, onstage; and then submit ideas to decision makers, including representatives from local and regional government. In collaboration with advocacy groups and stakeholders, these ideas are then developed into specific and feasible policy proposals, during the events themselves. Following debate and amendments, the proposals are ready for a community vote. Finally, policymakers carry these proposals forward to their respective chambers—using theatre to spark concrete civic change.

This process informed and directly led to new legislation and changes in institutional practice in New York City, including the passage of the Community Safety Act and the development of the Municipal ID, which allowed transgender and undocumented New Yorkers to access essential and accurate identification documents. The GM Homelessness Prevention Strategy Legislative Theatre project was inspired by the work with the NY City Council and led to an ongoing wave of LT efforts around the UK, relating to housing, the climate crisis, and cultural equity.

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**)*

1st objective: To improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy.

2nd objective: To achieve higher levels of equality in terms of participation

This project existed within an ongoing effort to embed co-production into the policy and decision-making ecosystems of the GMCA. Legislative Theatre seeks to prioritise voices and perspectives of people whom the respective policies being discussed and proposed do

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and will affect, making sure that such experience is being valued as legitimate and useful expertise. The project aimed to generate creative and effective policy solutions, facilitated by people with experience of homelessness.

Methodology

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

The first phase, beginning in April 2020, consisted of recruiting a cohort of 5 facilitators-in-training, who brought experience with the arts, organising and leadership, and were directly impacted by homelessness. They practised games, scene development and deliberation, which they facilitated in the following phases.

In the second phase, from July 2020, 35 residents came together to create 3 original plays based on their experiences of homelessness services, with weekly rehearsals over 6 weeks for each play. These performances explored the topics of Multiple Disadvantage; Funding & Commissioning; and Structural Racism in Homelessness Services: issues identified as priorities by the GM Homelessness Action Network, an intersector advocacy group. All participants were paid, with travel and expenses covered. The facilitation training and process co-design were implemented by Katy Rubin, international LT practitioner based in Manchester.

From September 2020-March 2021, 3 public LT events directly reached over 300 audience members, made up of people with experience of homelessness, frontline staff, GMCA officers and elected officials, and residents. Audiences were invited to debate, and improvise alternative responses to, systemic problems. Improvisations onstage with the actors led to deeper analysis and sparked new policy ideas. Audiences then drafted proposals, including hiring staff with lived homelessness in public services; redesigning participatory commissioning cycles; and others. Following debate and amendments, 23 proposals were ratified by a community vote.

Due to lockdowns, performances were digital / physical hybrids, which meant extra technical resources were needed, and some consensus-building had to be translated into a virtual space. Opportunities included the engagement of a broader audience, and the ability to have the performances recorded for reference and distribution.

In the final stage, from March-July 2020, dozens of community actors and audience members attended deliberation meetings with the GMCA leadership to help refine the final Strategy, and ensure inclusion of the LT proposals.

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Innovation

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

The Legislative Theatre process builds policy suggestions from actual lived experience, via an artistic format, and asks policymakers to take the risk of responding with commitments in a public forum. LT humanises an otherwise predominantly abstract, data-driven or bureaucratised process or interaction; it “brings the person back in”. This presents a new way of gauging the actual impact of legislation on people’s lives.

This effort was the first time LT has been used on a regional level to inform a policy strategy with such a broad scope, impacting housing, health, social services, and governance. It is also the first regional homelessness prevention strategy in England; both the platform and the process broke new ground, and provided a framework for local authorities.

The process had strong political buy-in and presence, legitimising a participatory democracy process based in arts methodologies, setting a precedent for more unconventional, fun and accessible PD practices.

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**)*

An open call for facilitators and community actors with experience of homelessness was distributed by frontline services working with recent migrants; people with disabilities; and people with substance dependence or mental illness. This was crucial to the project, as the experience of homelessness is both diverse and discriminatory in its impact on people from minorities and/or facing various forms of social exclusion. All 40 facilitators and actors were directly impacted by economic inequality, and over 40% were from minority communities.

By presenting emotive and engaging scenes centred on lived experience, LT highlighted power dynamics and discriminations that may otherwise be obscured. It addressed the barrier of inaccessible terminology by building a common language through the play. Setting the tone through games, and prioritising fun for all stakeholders, depressurised the environment and de-emphasized hierarchies common to civic processes.

Finally, fair wages for all participants pointed to the importance of paid participation in decision-making spaces.

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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**)*

Street Support Network, a national organisation with a hub in Greater Manchester, with a mission of distributing information across the homelessness sector, hosted the project on its website, social media, and e-blasts. They were supported by the GM Homelessness Action Network, which brings together the charity and faith sectors, the GMCA and the local authorities of Greater Manchester, in distributing calls for participation, audience attendance, proposal feedback, evaluation, and strategy negotiation.

The participants also collaborated with community-based artist Carmen Byrne to design visual representations of the issues in each play, to distribute to the audience as research tools. After each event, she updated the illustrations to show how proposals would address the issue. These were distributed alongside the text of the proposals, to communicate the impact of community participation. Illustrations are attached.

Finally, the Homelessness Action Network monthly forums included report-backs from participants, alongside further deliberation of the Strategy content.

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**)*

A key condition for success of the LT process is the quality and reach of pre-existing networks, reinforcing mutual accountability. This project relied on relationships between the GMCA, Street Support Network, Homelessness Action Network, and others.

By dispensing with the safety of organisational and bureaucratic practices, the process forces policymakers to engage and interact throughout the performance. Participating policymakers included Paul Dennett, Mayor of Salford, Deputy Mayor of Greater Manchester and Portfolio Holder for Homelessness, Housing and Infrastructure, and 10 other local officers. They were invited, and prepped in advance, to help refine raw policy ideas, and respond to questions and amendments. Finally, they were asked to make commitments for action around the proposals: budget review, research action, etc. Policymakers sometimes became defensive; in those moments, strong facilitation was required to refer back to the events of the play, reinforcing the urgent nature of these issues and encouraging bold action.

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Evaluation:

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

A concise evaluation report (attached) was overseen and developed by University of Manchester PhD researcher Stanislav Benes, who was also involved in the project in a supporting and observational role. The evaluation drew upon involvement throughout the LT process of rehearsals and performances, as well as two retrospective group sessions reflecting more broadly on the LT process. Additionally, surveys were emailed to audience participants after each public event, and feedback was incorporated. The first of the group sessions was with people who had taken part in the process as actors, and the second was with people who had been present as policy and decision-makers ('spect-actors') in the audience. The actors also worked together to design the questions to be put to decision-makers in the evaluation.

The goal of the evaluation process was to reflect on the place of the LT method in the GM decision-making ecosystem, the kind of knowledge produced by the process, along with the opportunities as well as barriers to the integration and implementation of this knowledge.

Key findings:

- LT humanises data-driven and abstracted conversations in otherwise bureaucratic and technocratic settings. It brings the person fully back into the conversation.
- A diverse range of voices and perspectives is necessary to minimise blind spots and biases with regards to what stories are told, and how they are told.
- A consistent and reliable time and resource commitment on the part of professional and organisational stakeholders is necessary to make sure policy suggestions stemming from the LT process are as relevant and actionable as possible.
- Twenty-three policy suggestions from the LT performances were integrated into the GMCA Homelessness Prevention strategy, meeting one of the key goals of the process.

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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**)*

The overarching goal of this LT process was to help develop the Greater Manchester Homelessness Strategy from 2021-2016, which currently guides practice and spending across 10 local authorities, with over 2 million residents combined. Overall, almost two dozen suggestions gathered from the LT performances and subsequent workshops with decision-makers were included in the Strategy document. These focused on harm reduction, joint commissioning, valuing lived experience, and inclusivity. Some changes inspired by these proposals have already been funded by the national government (through the Changing Futures program) and private philanthropy (an ongoing Legislative Theatre Action Network, which is currently developing lived experience-led training for council staff).

A number of actors reported a positive impact on confidence, to be an advocate for oneself as well as for others, from participating in the LT process. Policymakers expressed that the process refreshed the value of collective decision-making and a person-centred approach that tends to fade into the background in their day-to-day roles.

The project showcased the ability of the method to address key strategic issues such as commissioning in a nuanced and inclusive manner. This contributed to an appetite for further applying the LT process in other policy-making spaces across Greater Manchester, including the private rental sector and the GM Housing First pilot. The project's impact also encouraged other local authorities around the UK to experiment with innovative PD practices. Since early 2021, Legislative Theatre has been implemented with Glasgow City Council and Glaswegian youth to inform equitable climate policy; with Coventry and London Haringey councils, to develop new rough sleeping strategies; and with Islington Council, to inform cultural equity policy.

Finally, throughout GM, coproduction has been encouraged and embedded further, including various coproduction roles at regional and local levels, and continued exploration of coproduction in policy making, recruitment, commissioning and assurance, and budget decisions.

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**)*

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Legislative Theatre (LT) is an innovative participatory democracy tool using theatre to shape policy decisions. Created in Brazil in the 1990s by the activist and director Augusto Boal, and popularised in New York City since 2012, LT brings residents, policymakers and advocates together into creative dialogue, and offers a rigorous and fun testing space for new policy and practice.

The Greater Manchester Homelessness Prevention Strategy Legislative Theatre project, April 2020-July 2021, aimed to improve the quality of public decision-making through the mechanisms of participatory democracy, and prioritise perspectives of people directly affected by the policies being discussed. A vast intersector network helped engage participants with varying experiences, including recent migrants and people with disabilities. This was crucial, as the experience of homelessness is both diverse and discriminatory in its impact on people facing various forms of social exclusion.

Thirty-five residents came together to create 3 original plays based on their experiences of homelessness services. Their creative process, through games, dialogue and scene development, was also facilitated by people with experience of homelessness. These performances explored the topics of Multiple Disadvantage; Funding & Commissioning; and Structural Racism in Homelessness Services. The facilitation training and process co-design were implemented by Katy Rubin, international LT practitioner based in Manchester.

Three public LT events reached over 300 audience members, including people with experience of homelessness, frontline staff, local officers and elected officials, advocates and residents. Audiences were invited to improvise alternative responses onstage to address systemic problems, leading to deeper analysis and more nuanced ideas, in an iterative process. Audiences were then ready to draft their proposals, including hiring staff with experience of homelessness in public services; redesigning participatory commissioning cycles; and others. Following debate and amendments, 23 proposals were put to a community vote. Due to the pandemic, performances were held as digital / physical hybrids, which allowed for the engagement of a broader audience.

Overall, over 20 suggestions gathered from the LT performances and subsequent workshops were included in the GM Homelessness Strategy 2021-2016, which guides practice and spending across 10 local authorities, with over 2 million residents combined. These focused on harm reduction, joint commissioning, and valuing lived experience in workplaces. Several of these changes have since been funded by national government and private philanthropy.

An evaluation was conducted using participatory research processes, to reflect on the place of the LT method in the GM decision-making ecosystem, the kind of knowledge produced by the process, along with opportunities as well as barriers to the implementation of this knowledge. The project showcased the ability of the method to address key strategic issues such as commissioning in a nuanced and inclusive manner. This contributed to an appetite for further applying the LT process in other policy-making spaces across Greater Manchester. The project's impact also encouraged other UK local authorities to experiment with innovative PD practices. Since early 2021, Legislative

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Theatre has been implemented with, among others, Glasgow City Council and Glaswegian youth, informing equitable climate policy; and Coventry and London Haringey councils, developing new homelessness strategies.

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

Supporting links (no passwords needed):

5-minute Project Video:

[Watch here](#)

GM Homelessness Prevention Strategy:

[Final Strategy](#), incorporating Legislative Theatre proposals.

Introduction to the project and facilitators:

[Introducing GM Legislative Theatre](#)

Project Evaluation:

[Legislative Theatre Evaluation](#): Co-Producing the GMCA Homelessness Prevention Strategy

Press:

[The Manchester Meteor](#): Enhancing and Diversifying Democracy, With a Smile