

# Role of Drug Task Force Community Representatives

The overall objective of having Community Representatives on Drug and Alcohol Task Forces is to ensure that the work of the Task Forces is based on and informed by:

- the reality of drug use and how it impacts on our communities and
- the need to identify the most appropriate, relevant and timely responses for those communities.

## ***Overall Role of a Drug Task Force Community Representative is:***

- To bring the benefit of your own local knowledge and experience of the drugs issue to the Task Force.
- To act as a representative on behalf of the community at the Task Force.

## ***Your role in the community***

- To provide information to the community on the work of the Task Force.
- To organise and facilitate discussion and debate in the community.
- Provide feedback to the Task Force from the community discussion and debate.

## ***The Supports you need for this role***

- ✓ A Structure in the community to allow you to feedback information and to identify issues; this can happen through an existing community network or may require a new networking group to deal specifically with the drugs issue. The key principle is that there should be a structure in place that is open to everyone in the community that has an interest in the drugs issue and that wants to participate.
- ✓ Shared responsibility with the Task Force and other community people; community reps are not responsible on their own for ensuring there is a community feedback structure in place, your Task Force and other local community groups also have a role to play.
- ✓ Shared responsibility with other Task Force members for the work of the Task Force; all Task Force members are in place to facilitate a more effective response to the drug problem in your area.

## ***Your role in the Task Force***



- Shared responsibility with other Task Force members for the work of the Task Force; all Task Force members are in place to facilitate a more effective response to the drug problem in your area.
- Actively participate in full Task Force meetings and sub-group or Working Groups and ensure you have a say in the decision-making process.
- Ask questions if there is any issue that you are not clear about or if you need more information.
- Go through the documentation that is circulated in advance of Task Force meetings, there can be a lot of it.
- Meet in advance of all Task Force meetings with the other community representatives on your Task Force to discuss the agenda and to develop common objectives and approaches on behalf of the community.

## ***The Practical Supports you need for this role***

- ✓ Timely delivery of all relevant documentation
- ✓ Access to administration and office facilities
- ✓ Access to email and social media, Zoom and other online platforms
- ✓ Technical assistance and training, including remote access
- ✓ Timely payment for Expenses incurred as part of the role
- ✓ Access to training on relevant issues

## ***Criteria for Community Representatives***

- Live in the area from which they are nominated;
- Are fully committed to the aims and objectives of the Task Force;
- Are able to give an undertaking of the necessary time commitment to carry out the role effectively;
- Have a track record of involvement in the local community;
- Have knowledge and experience of local drug issues either through personal experience, involvement in local community or working in a drugs project.

## ***Guidelines for Community Representatives***

- Community reps are nominated as people who can represent the interests of the wider community (through whatever kind of community structure/network is in place in your community). Their role, therefore, is to bring the view of the wider community to the Task Force and to keep their community informed on the Task Force's work.
- Community representatives are **not** members of the Task Force as individuals and they are **not** there to represent the interests of any particular organisation.
- It is often the case that local residents who have an interest in and knowledge of the drugs issue will also be involved with a local organisation, either as a volunteer or a worker. In situations where a Community Rep is either a worker or Board member of a project that is funded by the Task Force, he/she should be made aware of the standard conflict of interest procedures that apply when he/she takes on the role of the Community Rep.
- Nominations should be for a period of at least two years and can be subject to review by the Community Network after that time period.
- The general principle is that there should be a balance on the overall Community Reps group between people who have experience of the role, having been in it for a while, and people who are newer to it.

## ***Communities of Interest***

In addition to area-based communities, there are non-geographic communities who need to be included in the work of the Task Force as community members and their participation should be facilitated by the Task Force. These Communities of Interest include:

- People who use Drugs
- Family members of people who use drugs
- Members of the Traveller community
- Members of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBTI+) community
- Members of Black and Ethnic Minority and migrant communities.

Each Task Force is responsible for facilitating and supporting the engagement of Communities of Interest and the Community Reps can work with the Task Force in looking at how groups representing Communities of Interest can be engaged, taking into account existing relationships with representatives of these communities and/or the need to build new relationships. We have already noted that Community Networks can play a key role in supporting this engagement.

## ***Voice for Young People***

A major gap in our current community representation is the absence of a voice for young people. Young people provide essential insights into how drug-related issues are impacting on their lives and the lives of their peers and have a crucial role to play in helping to shape relevant and effective responses. We need to change the situation where issues relating to young people and drugs are usually discussed without the engagement of young people and the voices of young people should be heard and facilitated at the Task Force.

This can be done by Community Reps and Task Forces engaging with Youth Services in their area to agree a process to facilitate engagement of young people – examples include at least one of the Community Reps being a young person aged 18 to 25 or having specific youth representation in addition to the area-based Reps.

## ***The Task Force Community Reps Group***

A key support for the role of the Community Rep is participation in the Task Force Community Reps Group. This provides the opportunity to meet in advance of all Task Force meetings with the other community representatives on your Task Force to discuss the agenda and to develop common approaches. Again, Zoom can be a useful tool for holding these meetings.

### ***Overall Aim of Community Reps Group:***

To ensure that the voice of the community is represented at Task Force meetings and that the focus of the underlying causes of drug use, such as inequality and social disadvantage, remain central to the mission of the Task Force.

### ***Objectives:***

- ✓ To provide solidarity and support for each other
- ✓ To provide a forum for Community Reps to meet and collectively consider upcoming agenda items of the TF in order to be able to effectively respond
- ✓ To provide a forum for Community Reps to discuss and prepare input on specific areas/themes relevant to the community that are important for discussion at TF meetings
- ✓ To provide a forum for support amongst Community Reps that is independent of the Task Force itself and identify further supports and training required.

### ***Membership:***

Membership of the Task Force Community Reps Group will comprise of the geographical Community Reps, Community of Interest Reps (including Family Reps and Reps of People who Use Drugs) and Reps of Young People.