



Join An NLGN Pop Tank

Introduction

Pop Tanks – ‘pop-up think tanks’ – are NLGN member-led issue groups around policy areas which are collectively agreed on by the network. The idea was initially born in response to the NLGN members’ survey in October 2011, where you told us that you want to be more involved in NLGN’s research, particularly from initial concepts. Pop Tank was developed to provide a space for the network to engage with each other and drive NLGN’s research agenda.

The first session was held in December 2011¹ to decide the issues each group would focus on and set the agenda. From that session, two Pop Tanks were formed:

Pop Tank 1

Reducing dependency

Pop Tank 2

Creating a desirable and effective commissioning landscape

Open to everyone in the NLGN network to join, you are invited to get involved to share your experiences and work with both your peers and NLGN to craft some tangible solutions.

This document outlines the initial discussions of the Pop Tanks, how they have evolved thus far and what they plan to do throughout 2012. It should be noted that, as an NLGN member-driven initiative, this is subject to change and open to debate.

We recognise that this is a new and different way of doing things but, if successful, has the potential to re-invent the think tank experience and make it truly participative.

¹ Further details in Annex 1

About Pop Tanks

Pop Tanks are issue groups driven by the NLGN Innovation Network. The content, activities and outputs are decided on and produced by the members who participate in the Pop Tank, which is facilitated by NLGN.

Why be involved?

- *Critical thinking space*

Pop Tanks provide a thinking space for you and your colleagues to consider key issues; both the 'big picture' as well as developing practical tools

- *Peer-learning*

Work with your peers across sectors on a common issue using a variety of research methods

- *Shape the debate*

The Pop Tanks are innovative in their approach and are not afraid to ask the difficult questions, challenge assumptions and push the debate.

Structure

Each Pop Tank is chaired/co-chaired by an NLGN member. The chairs act as the main point of contact between NLGN and the Pop Tank. All members of the NLGN network are invited to join and participate in either one or both of the Pop Tanks.

How they work

Each Pop Tank now has an idea of what it wants to achieve and how it wants to achieve it, which is outlined in this document.

In both instances, this will be a combination of desk research conducted by the Pop Tank Chair, NLGN and the Pop Tank members. Workshop(s) will then take place to highlight common themes and hear from expert practitioners. Case studies from site visits will then also be collated before gathering all the evidence to produce a publication or a similar output to share with the NLGN members and the rest of the sector.

Involvement can be through email, LinkedIn, attending an event, contributing existing research and teleconferences.

To be involved, contact Jenna Collins, Networks Manager at jcollins@nlgn.org.uk or on 020 7469 2653 who will link you in to the group and send further information.

Pop Tank 1: Reducing dependency

Co-chairs

Ann Griffiths, Head of Policy, London Borough of Ealing and Claire Webb, Head of Policy, London Borough of Southwark

Outline and Structure

There are many facets to 'reducing dependency' that this Pop Tank could explore. And indeed, much work has already been done on ways of reducing dependency such as personalisation of services, reducing avoidable contact and channel shift.

This Pop Tank however, will approach the subject from a slightly different angle and intends to explore the relationship between the service provider and the user becoming dependent. What is it about the culture and the human side of public services that can embed and reinforce dependency? Taking this in to account, do public services really empower confidence and independence in its users?

By diving in to some of these questions, the Pop Tank hopes to design a model/specification of a service that could effectively reduce dependency. We intend to source examples of public services that do not necessarily exist in the public service market but have enabled independence. Interventions that have used an end-to-end service approach will be examined, as well as light touch approaches to reducing dependency, for example, through networks.

Examples from the private sector will also be looked at, where companies have effectively handed certain areas of the consumer experience and traditional organisation-consumer interface directly to its customers. For example, IT firms directing you to forums rather than a helpline. In these cases, what organisational attitudes have been necessary to do this and how has risk been managed?

We expect services delivered by the VCS to be included in this project. In particular, we are interested in their role providing services to unmet needs and the impact of 'payment by results' in meeting unmet or multiple complex needs and how this impacts on dependency.

Methodology

1. Desk research. Where is this already being achieved? Both in the UK and internationally. Summation of key points
2. Dependency workshop. Roundtable of key speakers and stakeholders
3. Case studies

Desired outcomes

We hope that through this Pop Tank we can begin to rethink (and transform) our services in a way that means that by 2020, councils do not become merely social care councils and that the services that the public sector provides supports people to empowerment.

Next steps

Dependency workshop late April/Early May, convening local government, policy makers and looking at what we can learn from user experiences in the private sector.

Case studies and deep-drives May-September.

Pop Tank 2: Creating a desirable and effective commissioning landscape

Chair

John Nicholson, Director, Local Government Services, WSP

Identifying the key issues

- Do commissioners and providers have the skills to operate a commissioning/provider model? How easily can they be acquired?
- Who should determine services and priorities – LAs, LSPs and LEPs – and/or communities and their representatives (parishes, neighbourhood forums, others?) – What is the role for the individual user?
- What role can information and new technology play?
- How can new ways of working be encouraged / tested, and how much freedom should providers be given to innovate?
- Should commissioning be based around people, places or both?
- How much do current arrangements / regulations constrain change?
- In a period of constant change, how can flexibility be accommodated?
- Who carries the responsibility for / risk of non-delivery?

Developing potential solutions

The purpose of the Pop Tank is “to map out how we can create a desirable commissioning landscape”, i.e. how can we get from ‘where we are’ to ‘where we want to be’?

One-size-fits-all solutions are not appropriate. The Pop Tank will therefore seek to:

- Identify the key principles underpinning effective delivery models
- Develop a number of potential pragmatic delivery models
- Evaluate these delivery models against the principles
- Identify any legacy, skills or resource issues that need to be addressed if the potential delivery models are to become a reality
- Suggest how these issues might be addressed

Exploring the practical characteristics of good commissioning models, including:

- Governance
- Finance
- Legal issues

Methodology

1. Initial questionnaire in to current commissioning practices
2. Workshop to gather desk research, questionnaire results and finalise evaluation framework
3. Deep-dives and site visits

Desired Outcomes

To identify good examples of commissioning and highlighting where further interventions need to be made and how we can achieve this.

Next Steps

Pop Tank meet-up late March

Case studies and deep-dives April - July

Evidence gathering August - October

Annex: Pop Tank, first session, 8th Dec 2011

14 NLGN Innovation Network members attended the Pop Tank first session.

The attendees were split in to three groups to come up with ideas about what issues would make a good Pop Tank; issues which are relevant and have yet to be tackled.

Each group was then asked to 'pitch' their top two issues, forming a shortlist of six potential Pop Tanks. The 6 issues shortlisted were:

1. How can we create a better bidding process?
2. How can local government better enable shared services?
3. What is the future of the local government officer?
4. How can local government integrate social value?
5. How can we create a desirable and effective commissioning landscape?
6. How can we tackle dependency?

Following a first-past-the-post vote, the two Pop Tanks chosen were:

1. How can we create a desirable and effective commissioning landscape?
2. How can we tackle dependency?

Other questions and issues discussed included:

- Localism and making it real. What is the journey and what skills are required?
 - How can we protect ourselves from the bad bits of localism?

- How can local government engage cross-sector to deliver service change and what are the mechanisms?
 - How do you achieve 'real' collaboration between public-public and public-private sectors?
- What is the future role of a local government officer?
- What is the future of a politician?
 - What is the role of politicians in making the big and innovative decisions (vs politics)?
- Market shaping and market making
 - How can councils support market development? If so, what would it look like and how would it work?
 - How do you get a vcs market moving?
 - What does a personalised market look like?
- Transparency, accountability, open data and social media – how do they work in a local government setting?
- How do you define neighbourhoods?
 - Resilience of residents
- Objective driven procurement




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