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Making the cuts – how to involve service users and communities

The Big Society, Small Budgets Model (BSSB)

Small budgets are going to mean a very different kind of public sector. In the future, it will have to make good use of all resources in society, not just those within its own control.

This means we have to ask citizens a new question—not just the classic “How satisfied are you with our services?” or “What are your needs?”—but rather “What role are you prepared to play in those public services which matter most to you?” Surveys reveal a surprising level of willingness by citizens to put more time into issues which concern them. However, most feel that they have not had the kind of offer that would attract them and, when they actually have engaged with public services, they have not been given the right ‘nudges’ and incentives to keep going.

Co-production will play a key role in harnessing the **Big Society**. But local people are only likely to take on the responsibilities involved in the Big Society if they are given more say in what happens. That means real influence in commissioning services. So the **Small Budgets, Big Society** model shows you how to bring citizens in, give them a real role in deciding future budgets, and engage them in managing, delivering and assessing services.

The **Small Budgets, Big Society** model is NOT about trying to disguise the effects of the cuts or pass responsibility for future problems to the third sector. It is about joint agreement on standards and on who contributes what (community engagement charters), and joint assessment of what has been achieved and what still needs further improvement. This is not ‘more for less’—it is a radical approach to achieving ‘better for less’.



The BSSB Model: Big Society, Small Budgets

As local councils are debating serious spending cuts in their budgets for 2011–12 and beyond, they need to call much more on the resources of the Big Society. For *Governance International*, this is not really about so-called participatory budgeting—after all, citizens are not so interested in the details of public finance. What it is actually about is deep involvement in agreeing service priorities and how public services in the future can be co-produced, with service users and their communities playing a major role alongside public sector organisations.

The Big Society, Small Budgets (BSSB) model suggests four ways to embed citizen insights in the service cuts process. The model is designed to help local councils manage cuts in service budgets with the least possible impact on residents' quality of life. Each of these insights is of major importance and we believe you should consider them all—but it is up to your council or public agency to decide the priority order for embedding these citizen insights into your current decisions on spending cuts.



Citizen Insight 1: Big Society Wide Survey

Objective: Develop an understanding of which services people value and need most, which services people value and need least, which they are most satisfied with, and which they are least satisfied with. Determine which services add most value to the lives of local people, and which, are most readily open to co-production.

Approach: Representative citizen survey.

There are many options for conducting representative surveys, and public agencies need to explore the most cost effective solution for each local area. Surveys can be undertaken face to face with residents, by telephone, using written questionnaires, online, or indeed a combination of these approaches. The most important thing is that the solution works to address the key issues in each local area, and *Governance International* can provide templates to ensure you have the right approach for your specific needs.

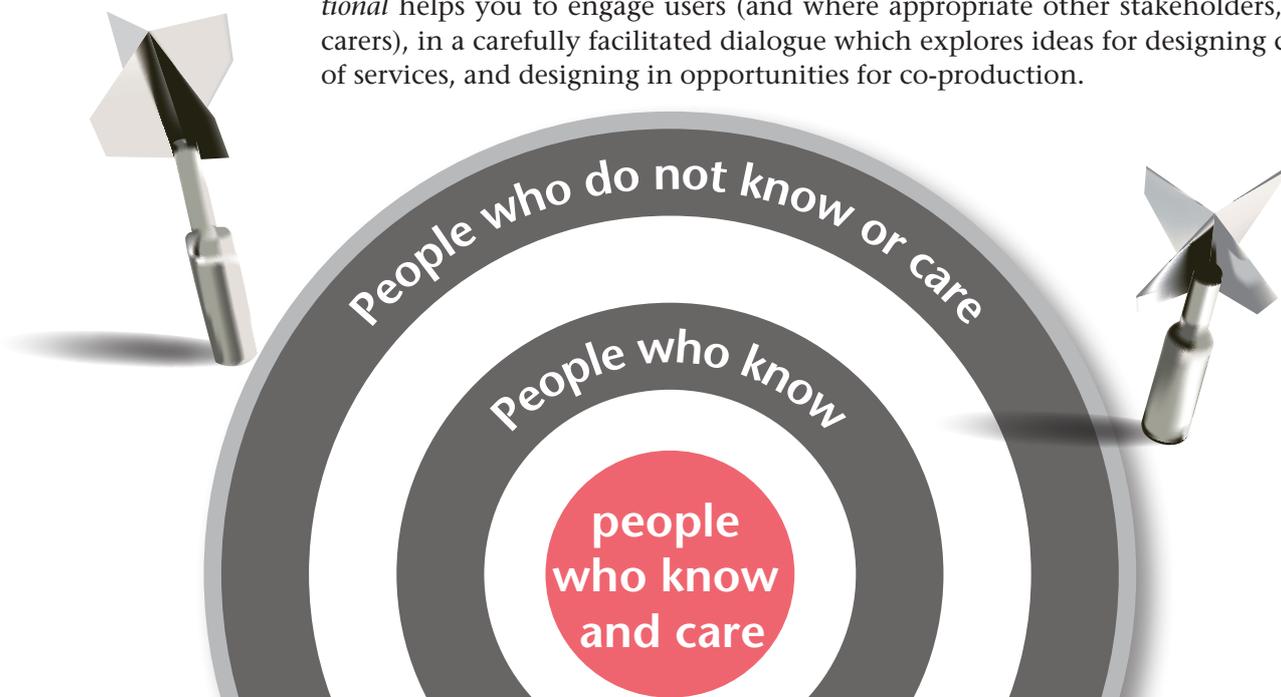


Citizen Insight 2: Big Society Deep Search (soliciting the expert knowledge of user groups)

Objective: Service users explore the services they use most, suggesting ways of making savings in those services.

Approach: Big Society Co-Design Lab with specific target groups and services.

Once you have identified the services which need to change most *Governance International* helps you to engage users (and where appropriate other stakeholders, such as carers), in a carefully facilitated dialogue which explores ideas for designing costs out of services, and designing in opportunities for co-production.



Your Partner for the BSSB Model

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Governance International (www.govint.org) is the leading provider in public service transformation strategies based on user and community co-production. Our team of Directors and Associates has extensive public sector expertise in public service improvement and business transformation, performance management, public marketing and community engagement.

Our vision is that service users, communities, public agencies and non-profit organisations need to work together more effectively to produce high quality outcomes that communities value at a cost they can afford. Co-production requires new skills on the part of professionals, who can no longer act simply as the sole 'experts' and powerful gatekeepers to services. Good professionals and managers remain vital to delivering the Big Society—but now they have to focus on giving guidance and support to users and communities as co-producers of services.

Governance International provides local councils, health agencies and other public agencies with in-house training, co-production labs with your users, consultancy and a peer network of international co-production champions to skill up for the Big Society.



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Achieving citizen outcomes

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