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Community Organising in Higher Education: Supporting Student Voice and Parent Engagement

Fiona Meldrum, Citizens UK
Dr Amina Razak, Newcastle University
Claire Rodgerson, Citizens UK

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Workshop agenda

- Introduction to Citizens UK

- Case studies:
  - Student voice
  - Parent/community engagement

- Practical exercise
  - Relationship and action mapping

- Feedback and questions

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

We aim to:

DEVELOP LEADERS
Diverse, those experiencing injustice, positional, allies in market and state

THE WORLD AS IT SHOULD BE

Better balance of power between civil society, market and state and a more healthy democracy. Social and economic justice. Trust and the common good.

STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONS
Diverse, civil society, allies in market and state

MAKE CHANGE
Socio-economic, balance of power, culture

We use:

- Organising
- Relationship building
- Training
- Listening
- Power analysis
- Research
- Strategy
- Accreditation
- Mobilising
- Local group formation
- Co-production
- Innovation
- Accountability assemblies
- Direct action
- Negotiation
- Celebration
- Communication
- Public affairs
- Finance
- HR

We focus on:

POWER
We build the relational power needed to win real change and we innovate for impact.

PEOPLE
We make sure that our members and those experiencing injustice act for themselves and have real power and agency in what we do.

PARTNERSHIPS
We work in diverse alliances and partnerships for the common good which bring our member institutions into accountable relationships with private and public sector institutions.

PARTICIPATION
We support people to participate in public life in a non-partisan way.

We are:

- Institutions
- Chapters and alliances
- Living Wage Foundation
- PACT
- Together We Can

THE WORLD AS IT IS

Imbalance of power between civil society, market and state. Social and economic injustice including structural racism and oppression. Social division and polarisation.

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Citizens UK and universities in numbers

Last updated: May 2024

5 junior partners (paying less than £5k)

13 strategic partners (paying £20k or more)

3 chapters without HEIs in membership

7 principal partners (paying £10k or more)

10 HEIs in membership that are not LW accredited

30 universities in membership

£625,000 total value of our relationships with universities

5 partners (paying between £5k and £10k)

£16,000 average dues paid per HEI

Our relationships with HEIs

Junior 23%
Principal 23%
Strategic 43%
Partner 33%
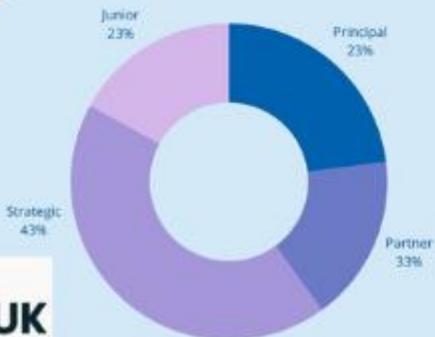
- 11 out of 30 embed community organising in their curriculum
- 10 out of 30 partner with us on civic engagement activity
- 6 out of 30 partner with us on research/grant capture
- 3 out of 30 have a consultancy agreement with us, or we have a role in staff training

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Anglia Ruskin University	Reading University
Aston University	Reading University student union
Cardiff University	Royal Holloway University
Cardiff University Business School	South Bank University Academy
City University London Students' Union	The University of Cambridge
Coventry University London (Steph Walton)	University College London - Department of Applied Health Research
Essex University	University College Union Nottingham
Leeds Trinity University	University of Birmingham
Loughborough University London	University of East London
Middlesex University	University of Greenwich
Middlesex University Students' Union	University of Manchester
Newcastle University	University of Manchester Students Union
Newcastle University Student's Union	University of Sussex
Newman University Birmingham	University of the Arts London
Nottingham Trent University	University of Westminster
Nottingham University - Geography	Westminster University Student Union
Nottingham University - Sch of Politics	King's College London
Nottingham University - Sociology	Queen Mary University London
Open University	Leeds University

HEI membership and engagement

- Civic University agenda:
  - Real Living Wage
  - Power brokering
  - Campaign co-leadership
- Research (eg Living Wage, Housing, Climate, Racial Justice)
- Teaching (co-design and delivery)
- Organisational improvement
  - DEI
  - Inclusive Education
- Knowledge, Power, Exchange

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Newcastle University:
Building Student Voice

Power, agency and voice

Training was useful as it opened my eyes about power, and that I can do stuff, and I was holding myself back... I only realised [the benefits] when I started working on the project (SAB3)

People feel empowered if they feel like they are being heard. SAB, our voice is being heard (SAB2)

From Newcastle. For the world.

Seen, heard and valued

it feels like a safe space, I feel like I belong, and I can say anything… it felt like I mattered (SAB3)

*Over the 9 months I've been here at Newcastle University, I've seen preferential treatment of white students…
the student advisory board gave me a space to share this, express this and unburden… a space to express myself
safely in an environment where I could share ideas and I felt listened to. The best part of meetings was being
given a fair chance to talk, it wasn't intimidating (SAB8)*

*feeling . sense of responsibility to make change . feeling more included in the university but I   guess that comes
as an older student too that you feel like you want to but don't know how to . so this is a good medium to get
involved in wanting to make change (SAB 2)*

Cardiff University:
Building strong relationships with the community

'Engagement'

Information

Consultation

Collaboration

Depth of relationship / trust
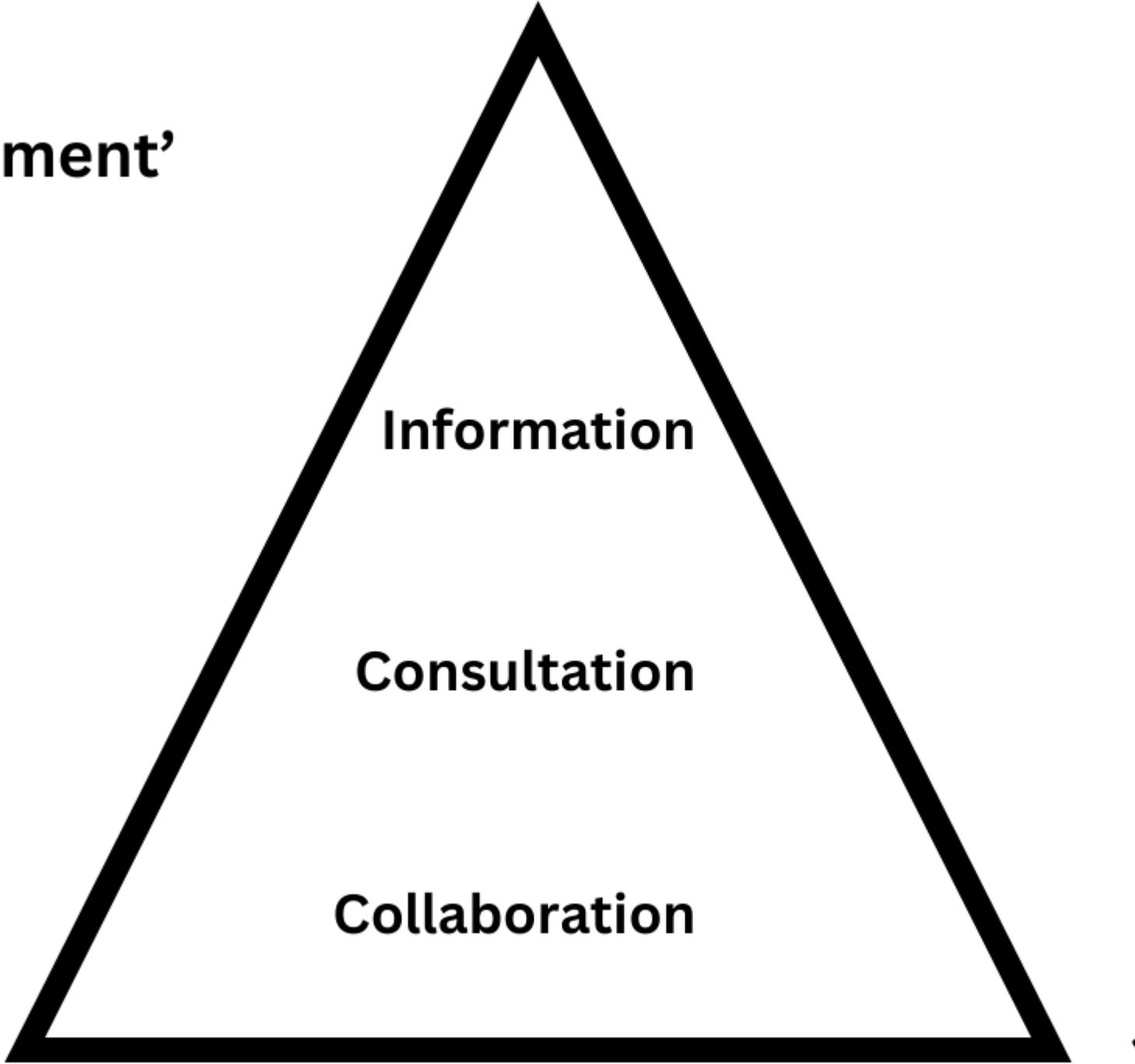
A broad
alliance rooted
in community
organisations
and community
leaders

Relationships of
mutual
self interest

Communities leading the agenda

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Equal seat
at the table

Community issues as University issues
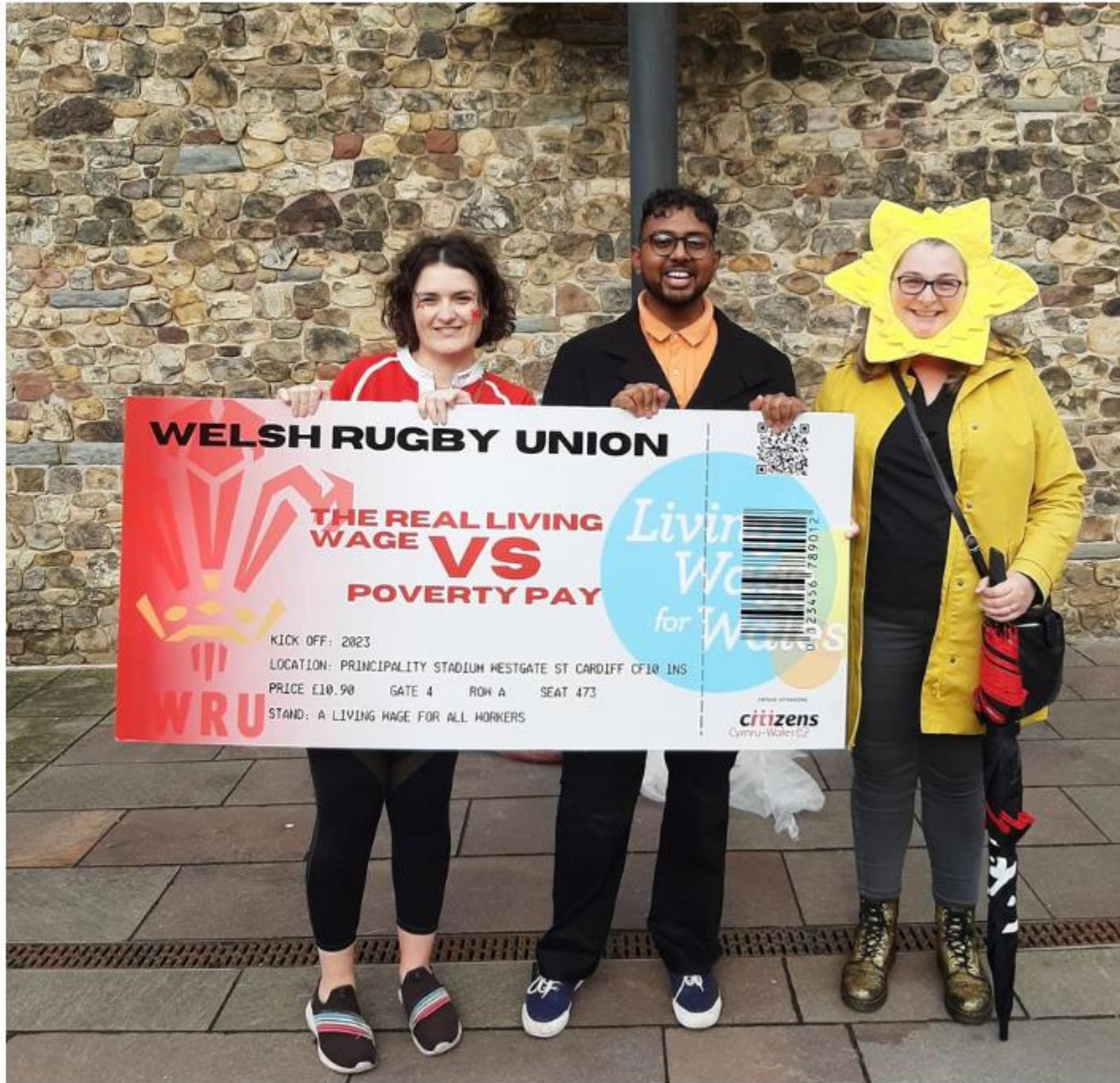
Practical exercise 1 - building student voice

Elmwood University has identified a persistent degree awarding gap, where Black, Asian, and other minoritised students are consistently achieving lower degree classifications compared to their peers. This disparity is concerning as it reflects deeper systemic issues and has implications for students' progression. The university leadership decide to set up a steering group to propose interventions to tackle the degree awarding gap and address these inequities. The leadership meet to discuss who they should include as part of this steering group. The leadership also raise concerns about challenges the steering group may face, including resistance to change, and differing perspectives on the causes and solutions for these gaps.

In your groups:

- Who should be invited on to this steering group?
- Who can help support and drive change across the institution?
- What barriers and challenges might the group experience? Who can help overcome them?
- How will the group identify interventions? Who can help implement them?
- How will change be evaluated?
- Who will evaluate?

Practical exercise 2 – building relationships with the community

Our Agenda

Competing Agenda,
Positions, Policies

Opposing Agenda

10
Decisive
Decision
making Power
or Influence

8
Active
Participant in
Decision-
making

6
Power to have
Major Influence
on decision-
making

4
Taken
into
Account

2
Can Get
Attention

0
Not on
Radar

Die Hard Support   Active Support   Inclined Towards   Inclined Against   Active Opposition   Die Hard Opposition

7
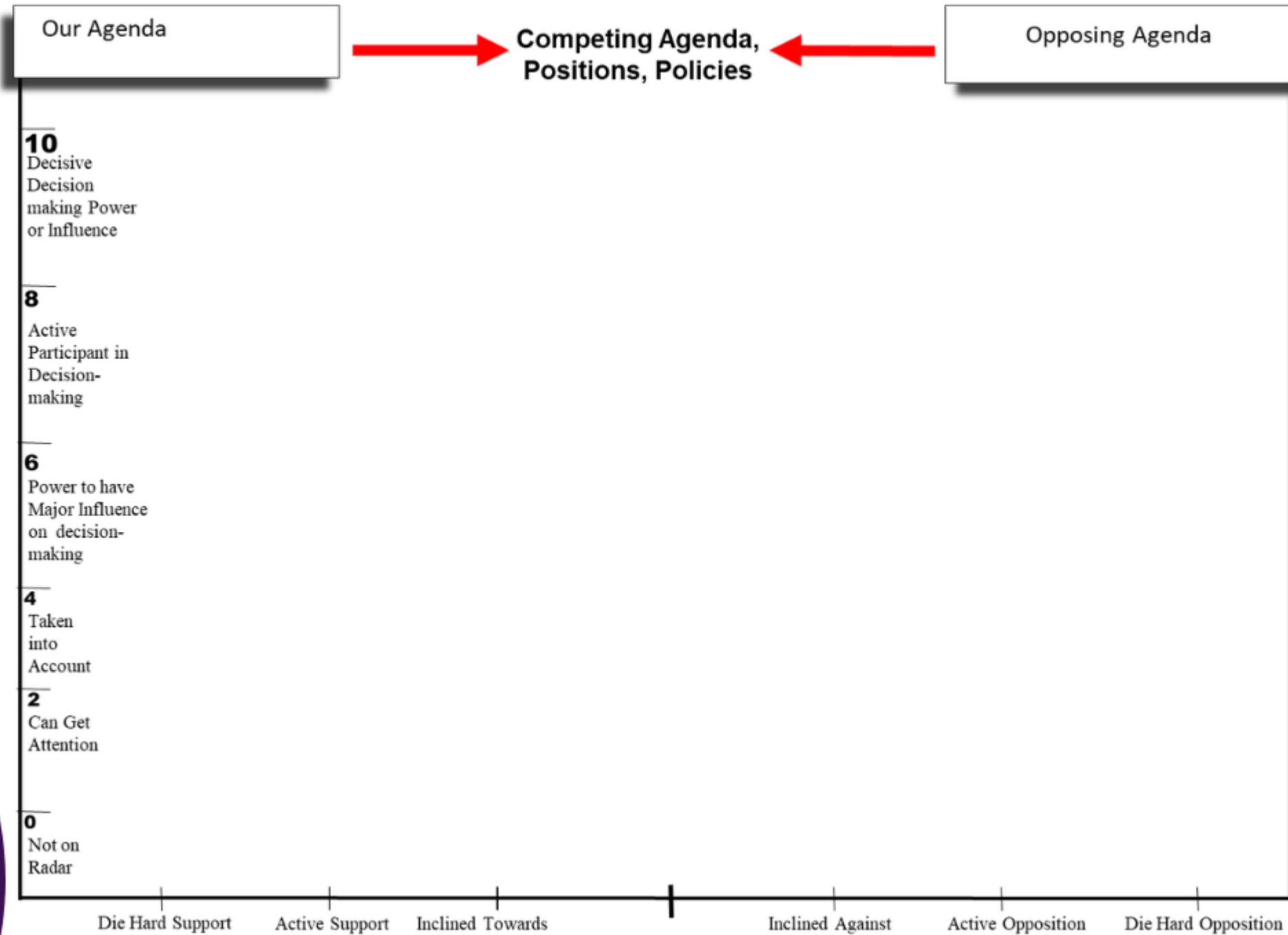
Using one of the headlines, or your own issue

- Do a Power Analysis for your context that will move you towards this vision (10 mins)
  - what's your (not your organisation) self interest in this?
- Reflect on your Power Analysis - what do you notice? (5 mins)
- Prompts:
  - Who don't you currently have relationships with?
  - Who do you need to do one-to-ones with?
  - How can you support the local community to build their power?
  - What do you need to change organisationally for this to happen?
- Discuss your reflections in pairs (10 mins)

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Resources and further reading:

- **Citizensuk.org** > Membership > Join us as a HEI
- **Civicast**: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqIe3yBf3rI
- **Newcastle University podcast:**
  https://podcasts.ncl.ac.uk/learningandteaching/category/all-episodes/

- **amina.razak@newcastle.ac.uk**
- **fiona.meldrum@citizensuk.org**

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