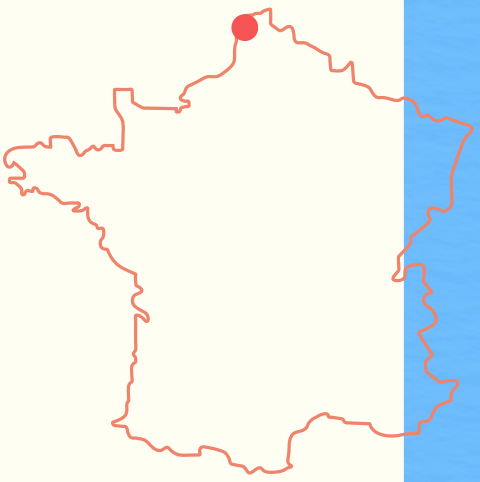
User Committees in Neighbourhood Community Centres

Bellidée, Saint-Martin-Boulogne

INTRODUCTION



FRANCE

For over 30 years, Bellidée has organised **User Committees in its neighbourhood community centres, open meetings held every three months for all residents.** Staff present the activities carried out over the previous quarter, together with upcoming actions and projects, as a basis for discussion.

Beyond this regular exchange, residents also help shape something bigger: **the centres' "social projects"**. These are four year action plans, covering general activities, youth, and family support, that each community centre needs approved by its main funder, the CAF (Caisse d'Allocations Familiales, the public body that funds family and social services in France). The User Committees are where **residents' input for these plans** actually gets built.

The aim is to **keep local activities relevant and responsive**, rooted in what the community actually needs.



ENGAGEMENT LEVEL

- ○ Inform
- ● **Consult**
- ● **Involve**
- ○ Collaborate
- ○ Empower



MANDATE

The User Committees are part of **Bellidée's regular governance and operations**, not the result of a formal political decision. Still, they matter beyond the centres themselves. Bellidée's main funder is the CAF (Caisse d'Allocations Familiales), the public body that supports family and social services in France. Every four years, each community centre needs its **"social project"** approved by the CAF to keep its funding. The User Committees are where residents' input for that social project actually gets built, so their feedback feeds directly into the documents Bellidée submits.

The committees don't have decision-making power themselves. Staff make the final calls. But **residents' feedback carries real weight**: staff use it to adjust or plan activities, and it directly shapes the content of the four-year social projects. Residents can realistically expect to be **heard on local activities and services**.

Over time, this creates an **ongoing back-and-forth between residents and staff**. That builds **trust**, and keeps the centres **accountable** to the people they're meant to serve.

RECRUITMENT

Participation is **open to all residents** of the neighbourhood, with **invitations shared through local channels**: posters, word of mouth, and on-site activities.

In practice, the **same engaged residents** tend to attend regularly. Still, the format stays open, and efforts are made to **keep it accessible to newcomers**. There's no formal selection process, and participation is **voluntary**.

The setting is **inclusive and informal**. Residents can speak freely, regardless of background or how involved they already are in community life.



PROCESS DESIGN

User Committees **meet every three months in each neighbourhood community centre**, following a **structured but flexible format**. Staff first present a **review of activities** from the previous period: events, workshops, ongoing projects. They then introduce **upcoming actions**, which forms the basis for discussion. Residents **share feedback**, both positive and critical, and **voice expectations and ideas for future activities**, in an open discussion.

Every four years, this regular rhythm is complemented by **dedicated sessions to co-develop each centre's social projects**, covering three components: a general social project, a youth-focused project, and a family-oriented project. Participants also help evaluate previous projects, supporting continuity and learning over time.

Staff at each community centre facilitate the process, making sure discussions stay constructive and inclusive.

OUTPUT & FOLLOW-UP

The committees mainly **produce feedback and ideas**, not formal reports. Two things come out of that. First, discussions lead to **small adjustments in ongoing and future activities**, so services match what residents actually need. Every four years, they also feed into something bigger: the **social projects submitted to the CAF**. None of this gets written up as a stand-alone report. It's simply built into Bellidée's internal planning and funding applications. Because meetings happen regularly, **each session builds on the last**, so residents can see for themselves that their input was taken into account. How much actually changes depends on resources and what's realistic, but the dialogue and the adjustments keep going.

RESOURCES

The initiative **needs limited financial resources**, since it's part of the community centres' regular operation. **Key resources include staff time** for preparation and facilitation, **meeting spaces**, and **communication materials**.

No formal external evaluation is systematically conducted. Instead, effectiveness is judged through ongoing participation, the quality of exchanges, and how much feedback actually gets integrated into activities and planning. **More than 30 years of continuity speaks for itself**, in terms of relevance and sustainability.

STRENGHTS

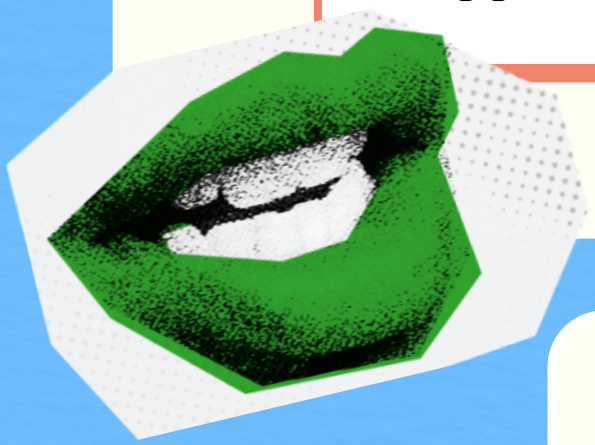
- **Long-standing participatory practice** embedded in the organisation.
- **Direct connection** between residents and practitioners.
- **Continuous feedback loop** that improves activities.
- Contribution to **strategic planning** through the social projects.
- **Low-cost** and **easy to replicate**.

CHALLENGES

- Difficulty engaging **less active or more isolated residents**.
- Risk of **over-representation** from already engaged participants.
- Managing **diverse expectations**.
- **Translating feedback** into concrete changes within existing constraints.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Regularity** is key to building trust and participation.
- Keep the format **simple and accessible**.
- Actively encourage **new participants** to join.
- Ensure **visible follow-up** so participants see the impact of their input.
- **Combine consultation** with moments of **co-design** for stronger engagement.



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