COMMUNITY
OWNERSHIP
SUPPORT SERVICE
Development Trusts Association Scotland

# INVOLVING YOUR COMMUNITY

A practical guide to the benefits and techniques for involving and consulting local communities in community asset based projects.

www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk

# Contents

# Introduction

This guide is intended for community organisations and other groups who are planning to undertake a community asset project.  It will also be a useful tool on how to gather information and build relationships with their community for any project they undertake or issue they may have.

Involving your community in developing and managing your community asset project should be a key part of your plans. It can seem daunting if you haven't done it before and the benefits may initially be unclear.

This guide:

- Explains why community involvement is key to the development and ultimate success of your project.
- Suggests how and when to involve your community.
- Provides links to other sources of more detailed advice and information.

Its key messages are:

- Effective community involvement is vital to ensure your project is a success.
- Involvement can range from informing and consultation to active engagement in taking decisions and implementing the project.
- The degree of involvement and exactly how to involve people has to be matched to your community, as well as the needs and status of your project.
- Community involvement should be planned from the start of the project and be a continuing part of the work.
- There are a range of approaches you can use and it is normally best to use a combination of them during the lifetime of a project.
- There are many sources of advice and support. A good place to start is to identify another project which has been successful in involving a local community.

# Why involving your community will help

Involving your community in your project from the outset and at every stage will bring benefit for your project, your organisation and your community.

These can be summarised as:

**For your project**
- Ensuring that the project reflects local needs, has local support and does not have any adverse unintended consequences.
- Providing new ideas and different perspectives.
- Identifying new partners and collaborators.
- Finding people who can bring new skills, knowledge and experience to the project.

**For your organisation**
- Demonstrating your accountability to the community.
- Creating links with the community and ambassadors for the project and your organisation.
- Identifying and building new support, skills and experience that your organisation can potentially use for other projects and work in the future.

**For your local community**
- Strengthening local pride, sense of community and quality of life.
- Linking people together so that the social capital** of the community is increased and people feel empowered to take action on your project and other issues which are important to them.
- Encouraging volunteering.

**For individuals**
- Seeing their views and ideas listened to and acted on, and so developing a personal interest in your project.
- Providing an opportunity for volunteers to use their existing skills and experience in order to develop new ones.
- Feeling part of their community and meeting people.
- Gaining confidence.

**For your stakeholders**
- Giving your community, local authorities and public bodies, funders and other organisations confidence that your project is rooted in community needs and has community support.
- Demonstrating the capacity of your organisation to involve and enthuse your community.

**social capital can be described as the level of trusting relationships that exist which allows people to support one another. The higher the level of social capital you have within your community (whether geographical or thematic) the stronger and more resilient your community is likely to be.

These are all powerful benefits of effective community involvement. They help ensure that your project is the best it can be and progresses as quickly and easily as possible. They can also build foundations for future projects by empowering and energising your community to tackle other issues.

The effectiveness of community involvement depends on:
- Planning it from the outset as an integral part of your project.
- Being inclusive.
- Matching the type of community involvement to the stage of your project and the nature of your community.

# Planning community involvement

You should plan for community involvement from the outset of your project. This means identifying the key stages and deciding what type of community involvement is most suitable.

It is also a key requirement of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 Part 5: Asset Transfer, that you are able to demonstrate that the asset-based project has the support of your community.

It will help you if you think about the following:

## Define your community and be inclusive

- You need to be clear from the beginning what area your community covers (this is sometimes defined formally in the organisation's constitution). It can be more challenging to define it in a large urban area. In rural areas for organisations that cover a wide geographic area, including different, distinct communities, you may have to meet the challenge by treating separate settlements differently whilst conveying the same message.

- Just as importantly, be clear about the people who live in the area e.g. different age groups, where people live, what they do, how they might want to be involved, and the best ways of communicating with them (e.g. inviting them to public meetings, using newsletters, social media or a combination of these).

- Use all of that information to be as inclusive as possible by thinking about how best to involve as many people as you can.

## Be clear why, when and how you are going to involve people

Thinking of the potential benefits described in the previous section, clarify why you are involving people at each stage of your project and how you are going to do it.

- **Informing** people is the starting point and will be important throughout the project.

- **Consulting** people should take place when there are options to define or decisions to be taken, and community views will help your organisation reach the best decision.

- **Engaging** people should take place when there is clear support and commitment for your project and where people want to get closely involved.

Decide which of the techniques, or a combination of them, will best match what you want to achieve. To provide an indication of the range available, the appendices give examples of some of the techniques which have been used by other communities.

## Consider who should be involved and what will be acceptable to them

- Who will be affected by the project? Is it the whole community? Are there specific groups that will have the most interest in it?

- Are there likely to be objections and if so, how will you deal with them?

- What level of involvement will people want or expect? This can be difficult to know at the outset unless the project has been the subject of much prior discussion. Gathering early information and simply asking people will determine how much you will need to address this.

- Why should people support the project and/ or get involved? Think carefully about your message. People tend to connect firstly to direct benefits for themselves and then to benefits for the wider community.

**Ranking the impact of suggestions**

|  | HIGH IMPACT | MEDIUM IMPACT | LOW IMPACT |
|---|---|---|---|
| Easy to implement |  |  |  |
| Medium to implement |  |  |  |
| Difficult to implement |  |  |  |

## Be realistic and honest

- At every stage make it very clear to people in the community why they are being involved, how they can be involved, what will happen as a result and then report back to them.

- Be honest about how much room there is for the community to influence the project and only consult and engage them on what they can influence or decide. Planning involvement from the outset will maximise the opportunity for people to be involved before the options have been chosen or decisions taken.

- Decide what resources – knowledge, skills, experience, time and money – you are realistically going to have available to undertake your community involvement. It is often possible to attract funding for this type of work and to pay for support from professional consultants/facilitators if there is a case for using them.

In summary, plan community involvement as a main strand of your project from the outset. Aim to be inclusive and provide people with as many opportunities as possible to be involved and truly influence your project while also being realistic and honest about how realistic their influence will be. Think about the resources you will have available to do the work and match the type of community involvement with each stage of your project.

An example has been provided in Appendix 4 (page 22) to assist in planning, to capture the range of activities, and to state who is responsible for the delivery.

# Informing

Informing is the starting point for any work you do with people. It is a one-way process but, if it is carried out well, it can help people to feel valued and informed. It is very rarely the only form of involvement you should undertake and it can be an introduction and encouragement to consultation and engagement.

## What are the benefits of informing people?

Informing people is important as it helps to:

- Gain general support for and understanding of your project and provide an opportunity for anybody who has doubts about it to raise them at an early stage.
- Ensure people know exactly what is planned, and why.
- Get to know the people involved and encourage trust.
- Attract help and new resources, including volunteers.
- Publicise progress and celebrate success.

It is important to start informing people at the planning stage of your project, and then to give regular updates so that people know what is happening at each stage and understand any changes to your original plans.

## Tips on informing

You need to be clear what information you want to communicate and then choose the best ways of reaching everyone. You can inform people in lots of different ways:

- Prepare a newsletter outlining your plans and deliver it to the households in your community.
- Use a website, a Facebook page and a Twitter account as good ways to reach people, and keep them up to date on the progress of the project.
- Display posters and leaflets or talk to people in places which they visit in their everyday lives: for example libraries, shops, pubs, community centres, schools and places of worship. You can also advertise your website, Facebook and Twitter presence on any printed publications to encourage people to stay informed online.

- Set up an information stand or run activities at community events. An information stand can also feature a laptop which you can use to showcase your social media activity, encouraging as well as teaching people how to get involved online.
- Speak at meetings of other community groups and your community council. You can use Twitter and Facebook to let people know about upcoming meetings. If you wish to film the meetings, these videos can be shared on YouTube (but remember to get permission from those you're filming first).
- Find out if council or voluntary agencies have databases of community groups and organisations, and send information directly to them. You can use Twitter and Facebook to interact with these organisations and groups and ask them to share your information.
- Send press releases to local or community media, try and get leaflets as an insert in newspapers or be interviewed on radio. This activity can also be shared on social media and via your website, for example by uploading a press release or copy of an interview to your website and then sharing this on Twitter and Facebook.
- Ask other organisations or community groups to include your project in their newsletter or on their website and social media networks, or to link to your website and social media networks.
- Encourage other members of your group to act as ambassadors.

When deciding which methods to use you will need to think about which groups of people you're trying to inform. Over time you can also ask people how they would like to be kept informed and use the approaches which they prefer.

Using a mixture of methods should give you the best results. It is also worth bearing in mind that to be effective you will need to keep the content of the selected types of social media up-to-date. It is often helpful to allocate the role and responsibility of ensuring the information being provided is current to particular individuals.

# Consulting

You should consult when you are able to offer people some say on your plans. For example:

- At an early stage, you might seek opinions on needs within the community, the options for meeting them through your project and the overall need for your project.
- At a later stage, you might ask people for more detailed ideas and options about how the project should work by involving members of your local community in planning your project.
- As your project progresses, you could consult on detailed design options for it.

It is important that you consult as early as you can, hear the opinions you've been given and then redraft your plans or make decisions based on this.

Feedback – You then need to tell people the decisions you've made and how their input was important.

## What are the benefits of consulting people?

There are many benefits of effective and timely consultation:

- Allowing people to feel they have had a say and been heard.
- Obtaining evidence on the need for your project, the community benefits it will bring, and community support.
- Reducing the risks of opposition and conflict with people later in the project.
- Learning new information and ideas or gaining advice that will improve your project.
- Getting new people interested in opportunities for more active participation in your project.

## Tips on consulting

You can consult people in lots of different ways:

- Questionnaires/interviews. Both questionnaires and interviews can be held offline (e.g. paper questionnaire, telephone interview) or online (e.g. SurveyMonkey, filming an interview and posting it on YouTube).
- Meetings.
- Focus groups.

- Social media – for example using a closed Facebook group to stimulate and monitor discussions or using Twitter to host a live Twitter chat.
- Going out to where people are – for example pubs, shops, community events, schools, community venues and local organisations.
- Open days at your building or site.
- Informal discussions/conversations.

The methods you choose will depend on your organisation, the resources you have available, and what is appropriate to your project and community. It is much better to do a small amount of consultation well, than to try and do a lot with little time, resources or skills available and therefore do it badly. The appendix contains some examples of consultation techniques.

Only consult if you are really interested in getting feedback. Only give people realistic options – don't offer a blank canvas if there are only a limited number of options. You don't want to raise unrealistic expectations which you cannot meet. Don't say you are consulting if you are only informing. If your organisation is new to consultation, or wants to try out new ways of consulting, it might be a good idea to bring in someone to help you do this (they could be consultants, new employees, volunteers, or people from other organisations with the relevant expertise).

Although widely used, public meetings are difficult to run well and have many disadvantages. You may attract only those people who like and are able to come to meetings and feel confident speaking at them. They can easily be dominated by a small number of people and become stages for confrontation. So it is best not to use public meetings as your only way of consulting people, and if you use them as part of your consultation think very carefully about how they can be arranged and organised to ensure that as many people as possible have their say.

# Engaging

When people are engaged in a project they become directly involved in making decisions and managing it or contribute to the delivery of the project in practical, hands-on ways.

The benefits of engaging people directly in a project are:

- Local people know their area best, and how decisions will affect the community.
- Involving more people means new skills and experiences are brought into the project and helps spread the load.
- Including a wider range of communities and more diversity brings different points of view and new ways of looking at issues.
- Community engagement is more likely to embed the project within the community, helping its future success and increasing the likelihood of getting more local support and people involved.

You can engage people in your project in different ways and for different roles.

These include:

- Working groups which are set up to oversee specific aspects of projects. They are normally short term with a specific task and can be attractive to people who have specific skills and experience but who do not want to be a full board member.
- A community advisory panel to give more detailed advice and continuing ideas on the project than may be possible in ad hoc consultation events.
- Volunteers who take on defined roles within the project.
- Trustees on the board of your organisation.

The engagement of people in your project in this way will grow over time and will be encouraged by the other activities for community involvement you have undertaken. You can use the information gathering and the consultation process to ask for ideas on how people would like to be engaged directly in your project, promote opportunities for people to do so and identify individuals who are willing to get involved in this way.

Social media activity can play a key role throughout your community engagement and consultation. Please see pages 20-21 for further information.

# How to get more advice and support

So far, this guide should have helped you think about why and how to involve people in your project from the outset. You will now probably be looking for more information, advice and support: there are a number of potential sources for this.

## 'H' Form – satisfaction

Pink – why are you satisfied?
Blue – negative aspects of the experience
Yellow – suggestions for improvement
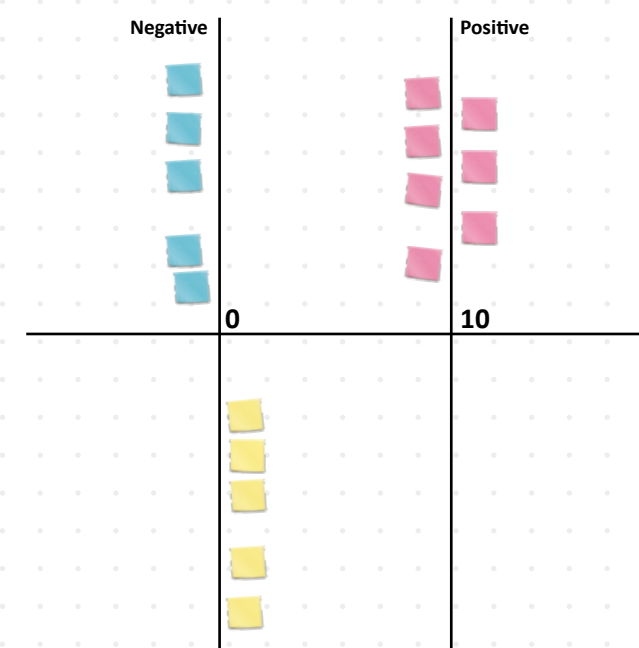


**Community networks**

The national organisations of community networks will be able to offer general advice and, just as importantly, should be able to put you in contact with other organisations that have experience of community involvement. A telephone call or, preferably, a visit to another community at an early stage can be very beneficial.

The key organisations are:

- The Community Ownership Support Service (COSS) is part of Development Trusts Association for Scotland (DTAS) and was established to support the sustainable transfer of public assets into community ownership. With extensive experience in community assets ownership, COSS is a good source of information and advice. (www.dtascommunityownership.org.uk) (www.dtascot.org.uk)

  The DTAS and COSS staff are also experienced in facilitation so you may be able to access independent support through them.

- Third Sector Interfaces (TSI) provide a single point of contact for support and advice for the 3rd sector within a local area.
- The Community Woodlands Association is very useful if your project involves forestry and woodland. (www.communitywoods.org)
- Local Energy Scotland is a service across Scotland supporting community energy schemes. (www.localenergy.scot)
- Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) work with community organisations and public bodies across Scotland. They have developed a series of frameworks for good community engagement and have a range of practical guides. (www.scdc.org.uk)

### Economic Development Agencies

- Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) – Strengthening Communities. For communities in the Highlands and Islands, offering a diverse range of resources, opportunities and skills. HIE's ambition is to see every community across the region reach its full potential. www.hie.co.uk/community-support

- South of Scotland Enterprise (SOSE) – driving inclusive growth, supporting a diverse and resilient economy, sustaining and growing communities. Based in the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway areas. South of Scotland Enterprise - www.southofscotlandenterprise.com

Appendix 5 gives a further list of useful websites that guide you with regard to consultation methods including examples of which methods to use in different situations.

### Funders and stakeholders

Some funders and other stakeholders in your project (e.g. a local authority or another public body which is considering transferring an asset to you) are likely to have expectations about the level of community involvement in your project and possibly have specific requirements. They may also be able to offer guidance on the approach they would like you to use. Some funders will be willing to provide grants as part of their funding schemes to enable community involvement. It is important to speak to them at an early stage in planning your project.

### Support from independent facilitators and consultants

It can be helpful to make use of independent consultants in your work. Apart from providing extra resources to do the work, they can also advise on how to achieve what you're looking for and will bring a fresh independent perspective. This can be useful in a number of ways. People within the community can sometimes be more willing to express their views and feelings about your project to someone from outside. The results of the community involvement may be seen as more compelling by funders and other stakeholders if it has been undertaken independently.

If you decide to use a paid consultant, make sure you have a very clear idea of what you want to achieve by the end of the project. Ask a number of consultants to submit a proposal explaining how they would approach the task and how much it would cost.

Independent facilitation does not, however, always have to be a paid-for activity. It may well be the case that you have associations with another charity or group who have an experienced facilitator in their team. If this is the case, consider discussing the option of reciprocal skills-sharing rather than paying consultancy fees.

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## APPENDIX 1 – INFORMING – To provide people with information to assist their understanding

### Newsletters

Producing a regular newsletter can be an effective way of letting people know about your projects and plans, and can encourage people to get involved and give feedback. You will need to decide how big your newsletter will be and how frequently it will come out. Be realistic: short, engaging articles with snappy headlines and lots of good images will catch people's attention. Consider inviting contributions from local schoolchildren or other groups and running competitions to increase participation and expand your audience. If appropriate, the newsletter can also highlight other local news and events and can be a good way of linking up with other organisations in your community.

Local businesses may be interested in buying advertising space, which can help cover your costs.

You will also have to consider how you will distribute your newsletter. If you have e-mail addresses, an electronic newsletter is very efficient*. Websites such as www.mailchimp.com offer free email marketing services which helps to save time and also to monitor who has opened and read your emails. Mailchimp also makes it easy to share your newsletter on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

If you're producing paper copies these can be distributed to households (but this will probably need significant voluntary effort). Alternatively, the copies of the newsletter can be given away from a wide range of local venues or through other community organisations.

*\* Please note that with the introduction of GDPR in 2018, it is now critical that people 'opt-in' to being on a mailing list to receive your newsletter. When collecting email addresses for the newsletter mailing list, have a clear note at the top to advise people that they are signing up to receive newsletter communications from you. You should also include a space on the newsletter itself where people are reminded why they are receiving the newsletter and advising them that they can choose to unsubscribe from the list at any time.*

### Using the media

Consider using the media to keep people informed about what you are doing. Local papers and radio stations may be prepared to publicise your activities and report on what you're doing. Sometimes this will depend on how 'newsworthy' your story is, or what else is happening locally. Find out who the reporter is and try to develop a positive relationship with them.

As a general rule it is always advisable to issue a written press release. This will help ensure that you get your key messages across.

An alternative to producing your own newsletter would be to have a regular column in your local newspaper/community newsletter. The local press are often looking to fill their pages and this avoids the responsibility of having to produce and circulate your own newsletter.

### Holding public meetings

Public meetings are a common way of presenting information back to the community, sharing information or airing pressing issues in an open and democratic forum. Done well, they can raise the profile of your organisation, be an effective way of sharing information and provide an opportunity for community members to have their views heard. Make sure you advertise your meeting well and take contact details of those attending so that you can provide follow-up information. Have a clear meeting structure (agenda) and build in sufficient time for questions and comments. Identify someone who can chair the meeting effectively and ensure that everyone can easily see and hear what is going on – use a PA system for bigger meetings.

There are a number of ways to make your public meeting more participative and interesting, but what you decide will depend very much on what you hope to achieve by holding the meeting.

- Use visual aids to show plans and photographs or display concise information. Break the meeting up into discussion groups (these can be facilitated by other group members, although this is not always necessary).

- Create alternative ways for those present to demonstrate their preferences – for example by placing sticky colour dots against a range of options.

- Use "Post-it" paper to encourage people to note down any comments – this helps those who do not find it easy to speak in meetings.

- Be adventurous by using electronic voting systems (hand-held control pads with preference buttons linked to a computer and screen). These can be used to gather digital responses to questions, with results displayed on the screen instantaneously. These electronic voting systems can often be hired for one-off meetings – try your council or local Third Sector Interface.

### Exhibitions and displays

Making a visual impact in your local community is a simple way of raising the profile of your group and its activities. Community noticeboards and other public areas such as libraries and town halls are good places to display posters and information. Use strong images which will catch people's attention and make it clear who you are, what you do and how people can find out more information. If you have a physical venue, make good use of window space to ensure your presence is known. Exhibitions profiling your group or displaying information from consultation or planning events can be effective in keeping people informed and raising awareness among a wider audience. Think about holding your exhibition somewhere that lots of people are likely to see it, such as in a busy shopping centre. Providing people with opportunities to feedback, such as a comments box, can make exhibitions and displays more participatory and give you valuable insight.

### Hosting a website

A website can be a useful platform for your group, including links to updates, articles and further details about who you are and what you are doing. There are a number of template websites out there that will allow you to build a simple website for free. Typical examples of such sites are Wordpress, Wix and Weeby.

Please note that you will still need to purchase your unique domain name to allow the website to be live and searchable on the internet through search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing. Domain names can be searched and purchased from places such as 123-reg.co.uk.

### Community mapping

Pink – positive
Blue – not so good
Yellow – suggestions for change
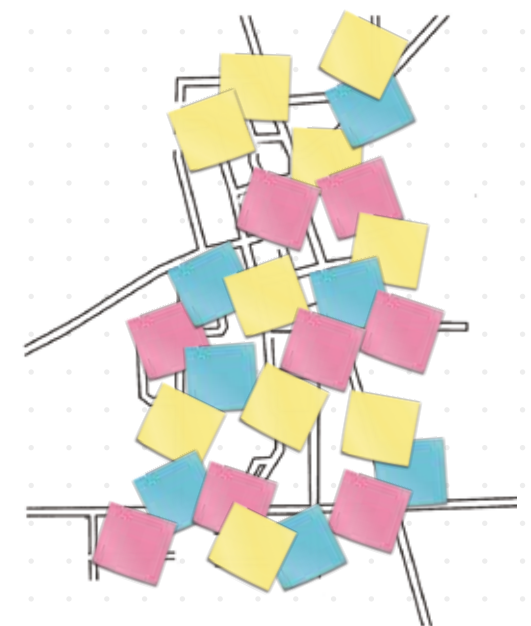
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## Using social media

**Facebook** is a free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family, colleagues and the wider community.  Organisations can set up pages that individuals with a profile can then 'like' in order to be kept up to date with general information and important dates like public meetings or exhibitions.

Facebook is a great place to share photographs or video relating to your project and your community. Those with an electronic newsletter can also arrange to have copies automatically posted to their page.  A large number of people today have a Facebook account and the platform is a great way to build a following and generate support for a particular project, community organisation. It's also ideal for sharing what's going on in your area in terms of recreational activity, services and events.

**Twitter** is a social media network that is based on the concept of following and you can create an account as an individual, an organisation or a group. The idea is that an account holder writes short, sharp updates, often linking to other information. Those who are interested in what you have to say can follow you in order to see your updates, and you in turn can follow other accounts that interest you. Twitter moves very quickly and it attracts people who wish to receive up to the minute news and updates. Like Facebook, Twitter also allows you to share photo and video updates. You can also share what other people have said, adding your own thoughts and comments where applicable using the 'retweet' facility. Twitter is a great way to drive traffic to your website or Facebook page, places where you might want to offer more in-depth information and detail.  Again, an electronic newsletter can be linked to your Twitter account.

**YouTube** is an online video sharing website that connects people across the world. YouTube content can be embedded in most other social media networks. Increasingly social media content is becoming video-based. Establishing a YouTube channel will allow you to post video content that can be linked to other platforms. It's great for telling stories and covering events, particularly for those unable to attend in person.

**A blog** is a dedicated webpage, which features regular articles (written in the form of a personal account) on a given topic. A blog is usually arranged in chronological order from the most recent 'post' (or entry) at the top of the main page to the older entries towards the bottom. You can make your own one using free blog software templates such as www.blogger.com, www.blogspot.com and www.wordpress.com. Blogs can also be built-in to your website, if you have one. A blog can be used as a means of reporting and sharing outcomes from events and providing regular updates on your organisation's activities.

## Other social media platforms

The world of social media is a fast-paced and constantly evolving one, with lots of platforms available. The golden rule is not to overcomplicate things and remember to use social media as a tool to help get your message across, as opposed to becoming a slave to regular social medial updates. Below is a list of some of the other platforms that might be helpful to you (please note that this list is by no means exhaustive).

**Instagram** is a free photo and video sharing app. People can upload photos or videos and share them with their followers or with a select group of friends.

**LinkedIn** is an online professional network with hundreds of millions of members. Their mission is to connect the world's professionals to make them more productive and successful.

**Periscope** is an app that lets you share and experience live video streams direct from your smartphone or tablet, linked to other social media platforms.

**Snapchat** lets you easily talk to friends, view live stories from around the world, and explore news using the Discover tool.

Further reading and resources:

www.weebly.com/uk

www.wix.com

www.wordpress.com

www.facebook.com/

www.youtube.com

www.begoodbesocial.org.uk

www.charitycomms.org.uk

# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX 2 – CONSULTING – To obtain feedback on specific policies and proposals**

## Questionnaires

### When to use

Questionnaires are useful when you want to gather views and get feedback on specific issues. For example, you may want to know how your community feels about a proposed closure of a public facility in the area and whether they think your group should be taking action on the issue. A questionnaire can be followed-up with a face-to-face activity which can provide more detailed insight into people's views and ideas, and allow those interested to get involved in planning and implementing future actions.

Objectives
- To gather quantitative (numbers) information from your community on specific issues.
- To reach large numbers of people, or target specific groups.

Methods
- Questionnaires can be carried out in a variety of ways. Using door-to-door collection is the most effective way to maximise your returns, although it is time consuming. If you are dropping off and picking up by hand, it is a good idea to attach a note to your questionnaire stating the day and approximate time you'll collect it.
- Stopping people in the street can work well if you are asking very few questions.
- Online questionnaires can be developed and distributed to a mailing list using free software such as SurveyMonkey. This site also helps you to collate and analyse your results. Twitter and Facebook can also be used to share the link to your online questionnaire. It is highly likely that you will be analysing the data in relation to the percentage of responses from your target population. It is therefore important that you consider including some identifying questions such as confirmation of membership – residence in a particular area – postcode etc.

- Keep the questionnaire as short as possible. For every question think about why you need that information and what purpose it serves in relation to the issue you are researching.
- Avoid leading questions such as "Do you agree that the community facilities here are rubbish?" Good questions are phrased in a neutral way to ensure answers reflect the respondent's views. For example, "How would you rate the facilities in this community?  Very Good – Good – OK – Poor – Very Poor"
- Keep wording simple and only include one idea per question to avoid confusion.
- Have your opening questions arouse interest and ask easier questions first.
- Prepare 'closed' questions which can be answered by ticking boxes. You may need to include some 'open' questions which give you more detail but these are more difficult to analyse.
- It's a good idea to test out your questionnaire to ensure the questions are easy to understand and are likely to give you the information you are looking for.
- Include a covering letter which explains the purpose of the questionnaire and why it is important, both of which should motivate the recipient to complete it.
- A prize draw can offer a good incentive for people to complete and return your questionnaire!

### Focus groups - Planning

Pink – positive
Blue – negative
Yellow – suggestions
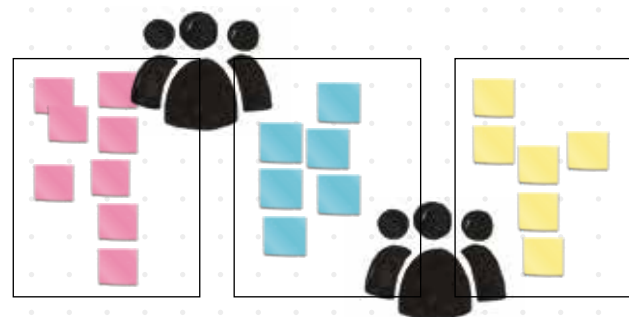


## Focus groups and workshops

Focus groups are basically about getting a group of people together, usually around 7-15 people in total, and asking their views on a set of questions. A really good aspect of focus groups is that people can build on and challenge each other's ideas, thereby creating some rich learning. For example, you can get people to discuss some findings that you already have, explore ideas, ask why they came to a particular view, and generally probe answers. For this to work effectively, it is a good idea to have both a facilitator to guide the discussion and a second person to take notes.

Confidentiality should be stated and agreed by everyone at the outset. It should also be respected after the event while the findings are analysed and reported on. Focus groups need to be planned in advance to ensure you get the information you're looking for.

Things to consider:
- How much/what kind of space do you need? Ensure it is appropriate for a focus group – comfortable, warm, and conducive to people wanting to stay and contribute.
- Do you need to provide support facilities, such as a crèche? Make sure these are available and meet the requirements of the participants.
- Can you provide tea and coffee? This will help people chat and break the ice on first arriving.
- What are the key questions you want to ask? Is there a logical order to put those questions in? How long have you got altogether and how much time can you reasonably allocate for each question?
- How many people do you need to help facilitate the event?

Some creative approaches to running workshops are outlined below. Again, these can be used and adapted to suit your purposes and contexts.

## Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

AI is an approach to running focus groups or workshops where you want to get detailed insight into people's experiences and ideas. The process can be used at the early stage of your group's development, or later as a review and evaluation of past successes and a means of re-focusing energies for further actions. This is a method which would benefit from using a facilitator as experience is required to run it well.

Objectives
- To learn from past successes and consider what works well.
- To develop a vision for the future based on these successes.
- To stimulate a co-creation process to realise this vision.

Methods
AI typically has four stages:

1. **Discover:** Through a process of 'positive questioning', success stories should be drawn out from participants.

Examples of 'positive' questions
- What have been high points for you as a member of our community?
- What are your three wishes to make this a more enjoyable place to live?
- What do you imagine your role might be in making that happen?

The group then identify common themes about what works and what can be built on.

2. **Dream:** From the discover stage, a dream or shared vision for the future is developed. This is presented in a series of statements that sum up how your community would like to be in the future. The statements are challenging and stretch the notion of what's possible.

3. **Design:** The group identify what they need to do to realise their vision for the future through developing specific action plans.

4. **Deliver:** The implementation of the action plans.

# APPENDICES

## World Café

World Café is effective when you want to get a group of people talking about a particular issue, or series of related issues, in a relaxed setting. It can help in gathering collective views and ideas and allow people to work through issues together.

Objectives
- To generate discussion around things that matter.

Methods
- A theme for the café is decided beforehand and the event is publicised to encourage attendance from people whose views you wish to hear.
- The venue is set out like a café: small tables with paper tablecloths (or pieces of flipchart paper) so people can make notes or draw pictures to capture their conversation. It is important to make the space as welcoming and hospitable as possible.
- People get their refreshments and then gather around tables to talk about the issue. Participants are encouraged to discuss what is important to them and to hear other views. Questions or issues that genuinely matter to your community are identified and discussed while other small groups explore similar questions at nearby tables.
- After a reasonable period (30 minutes) people move around with one person staying to make sure that people find out about the previous conversations, share common themes and develop ideas further.
- The tablecloths or flipchart sheets are collected and used to make an exhibition at the end of the event.

See this simple guide for more info on running a World Café event: www.theworldcafe.com/pdfs/cafetogo.pdf

## Larger consultation and planning meetings

There are different ways in which you can involve much larger numbers of people and make such events useful and meaningful.

One way of reaching a large audience is to incorporate your consultation into another community event such as a Family Fun Day which you expect a lot of local people will attend. For example, you might have a stall with information boards and interactive ways for people to respond to questions and share their views such as placing post-its on a feedback wall.

The methods for running planning meetings outlined below are highly participative and designed to give people ownership over the discussions, planning and implementation of action points which emerge. These are not prescriptive and elements of these methods can be used and adapted to suit your own needs and purposes.

### (i) Future Search

Future Search is a planning meeting which can be used when you want to bring together large numbers of people (60-80 in one room) to engage in task-focused discussion. The purpose is to focus on a future position for the project or the organisation. Future Search and other visioning techniques should be managed by an experienced facilitator to ensure that the outcomes are achieved.

A topic or title for the session which focuses discussions is identified in advance. Participants meet for 16 hours spread across three days.

People tell stories about their past, present and desired future. Through dialogue they discover their common ground which leads them to make concrete action plans.

Objectives
- To bring people from all walks of life into the same conversation.
- To build capacity for action quickly.

Methods
The process outlined below usually involves four or five sessions each lasting half a day.
- People make timelines of key events in the world, their own lives, and in the history of the Future Search topic. Small groups tell stories about each timeline and the implications of their stories for the work they have come to do.
- The whole group makes a 'mind map' of trends affecting them now and identifies those trends most important for their topic.
- Groups describe what they are doing now about key trends and what they want to do in the future.
- Groups report what they are positive and negative about in the way they are dealing with the Future Search topic.
- Groups put themselves into the future and describe their preferred future as if it has already been accomplished.
- Groups post themes they believe are common ground for everyone and then the whole group discusses them.
- Volunteers sign up to implement action plans.

### (ii) Planning for Real®

This technique uses 3D models as a focus for people to put forward and prioritise ideas on how their area, or a particular building/space, can be improved. It is a highly visual, hands-on community development tool which people of all abilities and backgrounds find easy and enjoyable to use. This particular approach would need to be facilitated by someone who has been trained in the use of the tool.

Objectives
- To generate enthusiasm and encourage people to engage creatively in the planning process.
- To inform the development of an action plan for a physical space.

Methods
- Large 3D models of an area or building are constructed. This could be done by local people with the trained worker's help if needed. These are deliberately not an architectural type model.
- The model can be used in pre-advertised sessions in different locations around the community.
- In the sessions, participants are given suggestion cards or post-it notes to write on, as well as cards with pre-written descriptions or pre-designed images. The cards are to help participants give their views.
- Participants can deal their hand of cards onto the model, indicating what they want to see happen and where. Models of buildings, cars, bus stops, schools etc. can also be used.
- Each suggestion is noted as the process develops. Taking photos of the model and suggestion gives a good visual aid to the process that can be used to give feedback to participants.
- Suggestions are prioritised by the community and with the involvement of key stakeholders; an Action Plan is formed which the community uses to develop future plans.
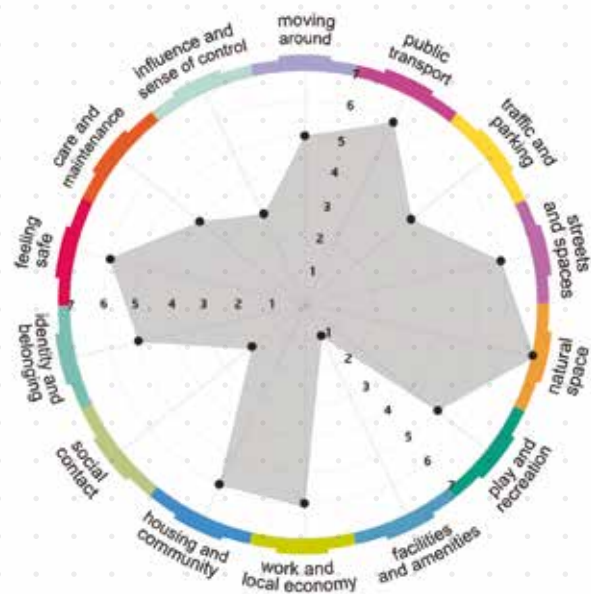
NB: Planning for Real® is a registered trademark and part of the Accord Group. Organisations wishing to run "Planning for Real"® events, provide "Planning for Real"® training or to describe themselves as users of a "Planning for Real"® approach should first contact "Planning for Real"® to discuss their requirements. www.planningforreal.org.uk.

## Place Standard Scotland

The Place Standard tool provides a simple framework to structure conversations about place. It allows you to think about the physical elements of a place (for example its buildings, spaces, and transport links) as well as the social aspects (for example whether people feel they have a say in decision making).  https://placestandard.scot/



## Using social media to consult

Although social media is largely used in terms of informing and engaging people it can also be used during the consultation process itself.

Objectives

- To encourage people who prefer communicating online to have a voice.
- To expand the reach of the consultation to people who may not have otherwise heard about the project.

## Facebook

Facebook groups are a way for a select number of people to communicate with each other around a particular topic or topics. Facebook groups can be open (anyone can join), private (anyone can request to join, but a moderator decides whether to allow a person to join or not) or secret (both private and unknown to the outside world). With Facebook groups a moderator can decide in advance the themes or questions that will be the focus of discussion. For the consultation process these can mirror the themes and questions that are being used in other consultation methods, such as Questionnaires, Focus Groups, World Café etc. You can also consult with individuals in a light way on a Facebook page by using polls. Ask a question with a number of options for answers and invite individuals to 'vote'. This is not intended as a method to encourage individuals to get involved in lengthy discussions. Facebook groups are better placed for these types of discussions.

## Twitter

Hosting a live Twitter discussion could add an interesting dimension to your consultation. Decide on a time, e.g. 1-2pm on a Wednesday, and inform people that during this time you will be asking and inviting questions on a particular topic. This requires good planning and fast typing skills!

## YouTube

YouTube is a social media network which allows you to upload and share videos you've created. These can range from a simple video shot using a smartphone to more complex videos shot using sophisticated camera equipment. Videos are a great way to gather opinion, capture the essence of an event and involve the wider community in a new and exciting way.

Posting a video or writing a blog to stimulate the discussion, as well as moderating and responding to comments, is also another way of consulting with people using social media.

**APPENDIX 3 – ENGAGING – Through adoption of some approaches explained in the Informing and Consulting sections, the process of engagement will already have started. For further or greater levels of engagement with the project then there are three additional levels to consider:**

- Participation – involve people actively at all stages to ensure that their concerns are understood and considered, and to give them some influence on and ownership of decisions.

- Collaboration – bring people into active partnership and agree sharing of resources and decision making.

- Delegated authority – transfer resources and decision making.
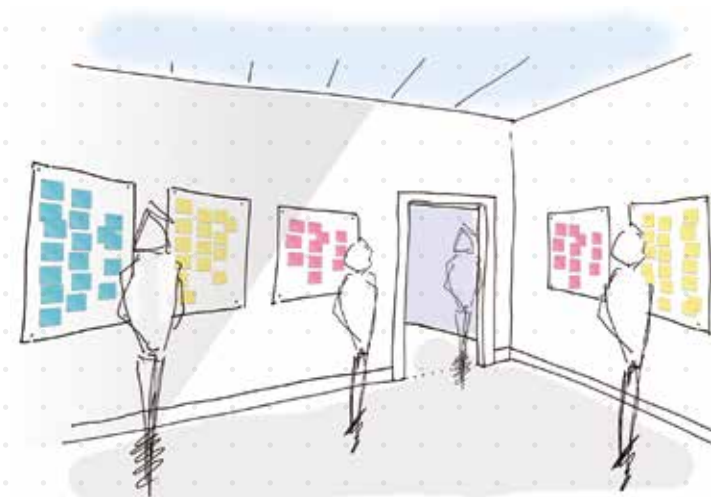


**Community Event Display**

**Participation** – during use of the methods explained in Appendices 1 and 2, watch closely for those people who are actively involved and interested. Encourage them to participate in smaller group sessions to explore issues in more detail.

**Collaboration** – during the process of consultation you may become aware of people who are also involved with other community organisations, public bodies or businesses which could support your proposals. Look out for these people and encourage collaborative working with them.  It may be useful to enter into informal, written agreements on how you will work together and what both parties expect from the collaboration.

**Delegated authority** – as you progress with the development of your project and proposals it may be useful to consider establishing focus groups for different areas of the work. This will share the load and get things done much quicker. Your focus groups are likely to come from the committee and from people involved in the participation and collaboration areas of work. Ensure that each focus group has a member of the committee included to keep a strong connection to the main committee.

It will be important to have written agreement on what level of delegated authority has been passed by the committee to the focus group and which reporting structures have been set in place.

# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX 4 – Planning template for community consultation**

The template detailed provides a guide on how you might structure a community consultation and identify the activities and resources required. This example has been based on an established organisation with a membership base and at least one paid member of staff. The project is one where a community is looking to take on an asset. It may well be the case that with new groups/organisations much of the activity will be delivered by volunteers. The costs have been deliberately left blank as there is likely to be a reasonably high degree of variation between the different communities – established membership base – size of the community etc.

| Level | Objectives What are the intended outcomes | Audience Who will you communicate with? | Medium How will you communicate? | Owner/Deliverer Who is responsible for doing this? | Cost £ | Frequency Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | June |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Informing | To provide people with information about the recent work of the organisation and new project information | • All members • Wider community | • Newsletter A4 x4 – distributed by email to membership base and other community organisations. Paper-based copies available in key locations – shops/post office/library | Project Officer and Board – Communication sub group | | X | | | | | |
| | | | • Establish website for the new project | Site built by volunteer member with content and updates provided by the Project Officer | | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | | | • Articles in local press highlighted new project | Chair of Board | | X | X | | | | |
| Consulting | | • All members • Wider community • Other stakeholders identified | • Questionnaire distributed by email using Survey Monkey. Paper-based copies available through key local locations | Project Officer and Board Project Sub Group | | | | X | X | | |
| | | | • Host public meeting to discuss the questionnaire results in more detail and gain commitment to move the project forward | Organised by Project Officer and Board Project Sub Group  External Facilitator | | | | | | X | |
| | | | • Arrange interviews with key stakeholders to discuss initial community feedback and outline proposals | Project Officer | | | | | | X | |
| Engaging | Establish a Community Advisory Panel to take project forward | • Interested individuals with a wide range of skills who have volunteered or been co-opted during the consulation process | • Meetings and email | Project Officer and Board Project Group | | | | | | | X |

**APPENDIX 5 – RESOURCES**
**Community consultation and engagement techniques**

There are a number of sites and resources that you might find useful which help with different methods of community consultation and engagement. Those below stand out:

- **www.communityplanning.net** is a very good site to use when you have developed your thinking further. It has an A-Z of techniques and a very interesting section of scenarios (e.g. village revival) and how community involvement could work in each of them.

- **www.participationcompass.org** also has more information and many useful links to a wide range of resources and publications from other organisations (e.g. Save the Children's guide to involving children and young people and making community consultation fun).

- **www.partnerships.org.uk** is quite an old website but still has a lot of information and ideas in an easy to read format. There is a redirection on the site to take you to ideas for games for engagement www.usefulgames.co.uk/ourgames. There is also a good section on social media and the use of the web.

More information on social media as an engagement tool can be found in this resource designed for community councillors: www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/28632240

**Examples of community consultation results reports** lots of communities have already carried out consultations. Speak to your COSS Adviser who will refer you to appropriate examples for your project.

- **www.communityplanningtoolkit.org** A toolkit for councils, the community and voluntary sector to engage with communities and work together to improve services.