

Starting a Community Group

4. Community Profiling and Engagement

Understanding your community and the needs of the people in it is essential when setting-up a new group or developing an existing one. This is a continual process of working with your community to identify issues, develop actions and provide evidence for funders/stakeholders.

What is a Community Profile?

A community Profile is an overview of a locality or community, it contains information on a broad range of subjects such as demographic characteristics, local organisations, economic activities and community facilities. A good community profile will help to identify topics for further investigation through community engagement activities

The type of information you need to include in your community profile will depend on your organisations objectives however, some information is relevant to most groups;

- The Census provides basic information on a range of statistics such as population, age and gender. Census figures are available from <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results>.
- The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is a statistical tool used for identifying areas of poverty and inequality across Scotland. <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>.
- The Socio Economic Performance (SEP) index, combines twenty indicators to rank socio-economic performance of rural and small town data zones <https://www.hutton.ac.uk/research/groups/social-economic-and-geographical-sciences/mapping-rural-socio-economic-performance> .
- The Highland Outcome Improvement Plan identifies key priorities for the Highland Community Planning Partnership until 2027 <https://www.highlandcpp.org.uk/highland-outcome-improvement-plan.html>.
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise provide regional information from environmental information to employment support <http://www.hie.co.uk/regional-information/area-information/default.html> .

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement is simply talking with your community to gather their views, ideas and feedback. The National Standards for Community Engagement are good-practice principles designed to build effective community engagement. They offer guidance on how to:

- Identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement
- Identify and overcome barriers to participation
- Ensure there is a clear purpose for the engagement
- Work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement
- Use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose
- Communicate clearly and regularly with those affected by the engagement
- Assess the impact of the engagement and improve our future community engagement

Why Carry Out Community Engagement?

Community engagement gathers the opinions, suggestions and ideas of people who are potential users of your services or affected in some way by them. Community engagement can help to:-

- Clarify the need for any proposed activities /services,
- Identify potential challenges and possible solutions,
- Provide evidence to help you develop plans,
- Gauge community support for your proposals,
- Define the scope of your group,
- Support a funding application.

Planning Your Community Engagement

Before you start any community engagement, you need to be clear what you are trying to achieve, who you need to include and how you are going to carry it out.

Ask what you want your engagement to do?

- Provide ideas and suggestions on community need.
- Gather information which will enable you to develop services/projects.
- Reach agreement on service developments and new projects.

Identify who you want to include

- What sample size of the local community will give you enough feedback?
- Will it be representative of wider opinion?
- Do you need to target a specific age group or people with particular interests or needs?

Choose an appropriate engagement method

- The method of engagement you choose will depend on the type of issues you want to gather opinion on, your budget/resources and the number of people you are targeting.
- Methods of engagement include:
 - Surveys or questionnaires
 - Public meetings
 - Focus groups and workshops
 - Exhibitions, leaflets and social media
 - Informal conversations with people

Tips for compiling a survey or questionnaire

- Have a brief introduction outlining the purpose of the survey and why you value people's responses.
- Keep the survey as short as possible. A long questionnaire is less likely to be completed and will put people off.
- Be clear what information you are asking for and keep the questions relevant.
- Do not include suggested answers as part of your questions.
- Try to use a combination of closed questions (yes/no tick boxes and multiple choice answers), alongside some open-ended questions and spaces for general comments.
- Make it optional for respondents to add their contact details.
- Include a contact name and details for your organisation so respondents can seek more information.
- Make it easy for respondents to return the questionnaire. Consider making your survey available online or if it's a paper survey enclose a stamped addressed envelope or arrange to pick them up.
- Set a deadline for submission.
- Remember to thank respondents for taking the time to complete the survey.

Holding a Public Meeting

Holding a public meeting is a good way to get more people involved in your group and be aware of what your group are doing. There are a few key points to follow to ensure your meeting is successful:

- Keep it simple - use the session as a way to share basic information and capture people's ideas and feeling do not get into the finer detail of how your group operates or the running of activities
- Make it accessible - offer support for transport/childcare. Hold it in a location that is accessible for people with disabilities such as wheelchair users or people who have hearing impairments
- Let people know what will be happening – have an agenda available before the meeting
- Arrange for an impartial facilitator who can encourage participation from all
- Arrange for someone to take notes
- Have a sign in sheet and data protection notice
- Allow time for informal conversations

Planning a focus group or workshop

A focus group or workshop usually comprises a small group of people brought together to discuss a specific topic or issue. This is a useful method of consulting people when you need to explore ideas and views in more depth. A small group can be less inhibiting than a public meeting and as such it can encourage greater discussion, reflection and a more free exchange of ideas and opinions.

- Arrange for an impartial facilitator to lead the discussion and provide them with a question guide
- Have someone to take notes and at the end of the session summarise the discussions - highlighting main points and inform participants of ways they can be of further help

Exhibitions, leaflets and social media

Exhibitions, leaflets and social media are a good ways to get the message out about your group or project. Keep these simple and the message consistent. Have a single point of contact where people can feedback to the group and use consistent design such as fonts, colours and logos.

Advertising your engagement activities

Whichever engagement methods you choose, you need to ensure that people know about them. Make use of as many available promotional opportunities as possible including the local paper/radio, posters, direct emails and social media posts – anything which involves the target population that you are trying to reach.

Compiling the findings

After you have completed your engagement activities you will need to analyse the results and report on the findings. You need to ensure that any analysis is clear and impartial, and presented in a way that is jargon-free. Include in your report:

- A summary that highlights the key findings
- An introduction that includes the reason for the engagement
- An overview of the engagement methods you used and why
- A detailed analysis of your finding including the extent of the consultation (e.g. numbers of questionnaires completed or event participants in comparison to community)
- Further work
- Appendices of raw data

Once the consultation is complete and the results analysed, remember to publicise your findings and inform people as to what will happen next.

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