

STEP 2

EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

This guide helps you to consider how best to involve your whole community at an early stage of developing your project.



IT IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUR STEERING GROUP TO GATHER VIEWS AND IDEAS FROM THE COMMUNITY ABOUT THE PROPOSED PROJECT. WIDE AND THOROUGH ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY WILL:

- **SHOW OPENNESS AND BUILD TRUST**
- **PROVIDE A SOLID GROUND FOR FEASIBILITY AND BUSINESS PLANNING STAGES**

Communication with the community and encouraging further involvement should then be an ongoing effort.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN CARRYING OUT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

To allow the community to contribute meaningfully take some time to plan the engagement programme. Think about the following questions: how will you generate interest and gather views from across the whole community; what are the main questions you want to ask; when should this be done; and who will carry out the consultation.

HOW WILL YOU ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO CONTRIBUTE THEIR VIEWS?

It is important to use a range of consultation methods to make it easier for people to participate in ways which are comfortable to them. The table below outlines some of the approaches that could be included.

Method	How can this be used?
Questionnaire	Could be done face-to-face, issued at public events/gatherings or posted out.
Open days	On site, if possible, or at a neutral location. An external facilitator can be used to co-ordinate the day. Running this event on a drop-in basis caters for a greater number of people as they can attend when it suits them.
Comment wall	Could be associated with a display or project proposal during events or left in a public place such as a library. This allows people who are not comfortable speaking out in public to input their view.
Breakout discussions during public meetings	Encourages greater participation by breaking into smaller groups, perhaps to address specific questions on the proposal.
Planning for Real, or similar, mapping events	This takes a holistic view of the community and services and allows people to make suggestions in a visual format. In some areas this may be supported by the local authority.
Discussion via social media	This caters for people who may have limited availability or mobility, though care has to be taken over appropriate etiquette and to ensure that local views can be identified from participants from further afield. Can also allow you to promote fundraising activities, share information, photos and videos on progress on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, which in most cases can be cost - effective. It also helps you to reach those that may be pressed for time (those with young families) or hard to reach (young people).

HOW WILL YOU REACH AS MANY PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE?

Make clear efforts to reach:

- different areas of the identified community if the population is widely dispersed or in scattered settlements
- under-represented groups (children and young people 18-25, unemployed and housebound individuals)
- those with more complex needs (parents and toddlers, elderly, people with English as a second/ other language, people with disabilities/health problems and their carers, people new to the area)

This could be done through attending lunch clubs, playgroups and similar groups to meet with people where they are already comfortable.

You could consider helping with transport or childcare to help people attend public events.

Also, try to have a range of methods by which people can get in touch on an ongoing basis, such as letter, phone, email, social media, suggestions box in strategic location(s).



HOW WILL YOU HANDLE DISAGREEMENTS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY?

You may be aware of some individuals or groups who have already objected or may not be keen on the project for various reasons. If you can explore some of these concerns early on and establish appropriate methods for receiving their views and having ongoing discussion this will help create an atmosphere of constructive and informed debate.

It can often be useful to bring in an external facilitator for an open event or discussion session in these circumstances.

WHAT KIND OF QUESTIONS COULD BE ASKED SPECIFIC TO COMMUNITY ASSETS PROJECTS?

- What do community members see as the needs and improvements required in the area, now and over the next, say, 5 to 10 years? (see Step 1: 'Carrying out a needs analysis')
- Are there services/features missing that they would like to see developed?
- What are the opportunities and strengths of the local area?
- What do people like about their community and want to see being enhanced?
- Which disadvantages or opportunities would owning the asset address that would benefit the whole community?
- If an asset has already been identified, would community ownership meet the needs and opportunities identified?
- What would people like to see done with the land or property, and which uses are the highest priority to the community?
- How would this achieve the improvements specified?

Always try to capture both hard facts and data (by asking closed questions) and softer, more qualitative information (by asking open questions). You never know what ideas the community will come up with to make your project even better.

Make sure the language is inclusive and open to all - including younger people. Overly complicated wording may put people (of any age) off.

HOW WILL YOU COMMUNICATE THE RESULTS?

It is also worth asking how your community would like to receive results of the consultation and be kept up to date with project progress, as this may well be different for various sections of the community. Steering group members should then be assigned to co-ordinate this feedback. Rather than try to take on all methods (such as Facebook and Twitter and website) which could become onerous and therefore lapse, pick a few that will be widely relevant and keep them regularly updated.

Providing open and full information about the results of the consultation and how this will be used is important so that people know how their contributions have been incorporated. A further intense phase of gathering input will probably be involved at a later stage once the basic project details are in place. Showing that you have listened to this early phase and maintained open dialogue with the community in the interim will help to build trust and encourage further involvement.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE SEE

www.hie.co.uk/ten-steps

or contact us on community.assets@hient.co.uk

