

# How to get and keep local people involved in your work

3 minute read

## What this guide is and who it's for

This is a short guide to getting and keeping local people involved in your work. It covers the why and how of local community engagement. It's designed for all types of community organisations.

## Why bother involving people?

### 1. Buried treasure

You don't know what you don't know. Often people have all sorts of useful skills, experience and knowledge that you can use in a meaningful way.

### 2. Different perspectives and insights

We can all get caught up in tunnel vision, especially when we've been working on something for a long time. Getting people involved helps you refresh your thinking and see things from a different angle. Crucially this can be the angle of someone who might want to use or fund your project.

### 3. New leadership and succession

Bringing projects to life can be tiring. Getting other people involved can help take your project to the next stage, or even in a different direction. It also means there are people who can take your project forward if/when you want to move on to something new.

### 4. Ownership of projects

Working with communities means working alongside them and creating a shared sense of ownership so they see the value of what you are doing. If they feel it's valuable they'll use the service and help you to keep it going.

### 5. Democratic engagement

Hearing people's views is the start of a good democratic process. This may be vital if your work needs people to vote for it (like a neighbourhood plan) or if your organisation needs members.

## How to get people involved

There are lots of different ways to get people involved, from initial consultation all the way to helping run your organisation.

### Techniques for consultation with your community

Choosing the right type of consultation activity depends on your audience and what resources you have available to plan and deliver. Here are some ideas to get you started.

#### 1. Hold a workshop

Workshops are a useful way to work through challenges, discuss issues, find consensus and create something that can be shown to others. Workshops suit smaller groups and allow you to go into detail about specific issues.

## 2. Send a questionnaire

Questionnaires can reach large numbers of people and be cheap to produce. But you need to factor in the amount of time they will take to analyse. There are online questionnaire formats such as Survey Monkey or Google Forms that can also help you analyse the data. Remember you will still need to try and reach people who may not have access to the internet. Paper questionnaires can be combined with door knocking, which also raises awareness of your work. Be mindful that if you rely solely on surveys then you may miss out on the interchange of ideas that come from conversations.

## 3. Transform an everyday space

You could use an empty shop, or an unloved patch of space. Transformation changes people's perception and demonstrates how things can be changed for the better.

Transform an outdoor space into a pop-up park or a street social like Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire do in order to [spark community action](#).

Or turn a waiting room into a public living room with help from [Camerados](#). Their [principles](#) are a helpful way to develop your engagement with communities.

## 4. Host an inter-generational conversation

Encouraging conversations across generation shows respect for the past and investment in the future. People may enjoy the opportunity to interview or capture each other's experiences. It's a great way to connect people and get children and young people involved.

Heritage projects do this well and you can use the idea of citizen journalists to get people to interview each other using simple questions like what they love about the area or their favourite local shop.

## 5. Make something

Use creative activities that encourage people to spend some time with you. This could be something really simple that enables you to talk to people, or you may want to get people involved in making models or maps of the issue you're discussing.

For example, Moseley Community Development Trust used Halloween as an excuse to get people involved in a Day of the Dead celebration where they could dress up, make a shrine and worry dolls.



## 6. Setup a 'walk and talk'

Group walks are sociable and can help get the conversation flowing.

# Techniques to involve your community more regularly

## 1. Create regular volunteering opportunities

You may want to invite people to help develop and run activities on an ongoing basis.

## 2. Create occasional volunteering opportunities

You may want to invite people to volunteer for a specific project, such as an event or fundraising drive. People may not have the time to volunteer on a regular basis, so having a pool of volunteers for one-off events is a helpful resource.

## 3. Involve people in your leadership and governance

It's useful to have a mix of people on your Board who use your services and have a background in finance, marketing or in areas your work specialises in.

## 4. Offer work experience

You can develop work experience placements as either short-term or long-term placements. This is useful to engage young people or people wanting to get back into work.

## What keeps people involved?

- A good experience
- Feeling involved and valued
- Good relationships
- Enjoyment
- Training and development
- Flexibility and the opportunity to change roles