

## **WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Community engagement does not have to be complicated. It is about speaking, listening and working with people to understand their needs. This will help you design, develop and deliver truly collaborative programmes and facilities.

Consultation alone does not create adequate connections with communities, which is why engagement is so important. Working collaboratively to build lasting and rewarding partnerships and relationships helps build trust with local communities, instilling ownership, inclusivity and pride in your project.

Community engagement is an ongoing process which does not stop when the project has been delivered. Continual engagement ensures that facilities and activities meet the changing needs of the community.

## **WHAT YOU MIGHT DO**

### **Working in Partnership**

Working in partnership with the community means researching, designing and delivering your plans and activities together. Start by identifying and speaking to groups who work within your target audiences. Examples of stakeholders could include - schools, GP surgeries, faith-based organisations, housing providers and other VCSE sector organisations.

### **Scope initial ideas for community engagement**

Work with local partners to ask 'where, what, when and who' to ensure the community engagement process runs smoothly and achieves your objectives.

Issues and themes to consider - Every community faces unique opportunities and challenges when it comes to being active. Speak to people about their life experiences and their relationship with sport and activity.

### **Plan ahead**

The next step is to consider who is best placed to undertake community engagement. The most successful engagement is undertaken by people with close links with the local community, who are known, liked and trusted.

### **Do it right**

Engagement with local communities should be conversational, informal and involve you asking open questions and listening, establishing relationships and trust. This will help you find out about their lives and motivations and the barriers they face to getting active.

### **Share**

Share your community engagement findings with all stakeholders to inform the development and delivery of your project.

### **Co-designing facilities and/ or opportunities**

Co-design is the process of actively involving stakeholders in the development and design of your project. For example, timing and level of activities, equipment needs, publicity methods, coach background, training and costs. By talking to potential participants, you can start to understand what is holding them back from participating, and what is motivating them to get involved.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TIPS**

### **Known, liked and trusted**

Choose individuals or local organisations to lead the engagement with relationships or connections to your target audience.

### **Do not over-engage**

Some groups are approached by a number of organisations, so check whether engagement has already taken place. You can use existing sources of community engagement to inform your project.

### **Identifying leaders and influencers**

Engage with local community leaders and influencers who represent the community and can help you engage with them.

### **Meet people where they are**

Go to their local area to meet in a place and at a time that works for them.

### **Communication**

Engage with your target audience in their own language, with the help of a translator if necessary and offer full access to engagement for people with disabilities. Identify partners that may be able to support you with this.

### **Keep your conversations welcoming and relaxed**

Be friendly and get to know people, then find out about their relationship with sport and activity. Keep things simple and avoid using jargon.

### **Be curious and open**

Show an interest in the people and communities that you are talking to, as this can go a long way towards building trust and understanding. Make sure you are prepared to follow the conversation and listen, rather than going into a conversation with an agenda.

### **Do not make assumptions, generalise, or have preconceptions**

Do not assume you understand someone's life, experiences or needs.

### **Building relationships takes time**

People have busy lives, and some may have had negative experiences in the past.

### **Keep everyone updated**

Share the findings of your engagement with your partners and keep them informed of your progress.

### **Workforce and volunteer development**

Deploy team members and volunteers with experience working in/ with the community or prior community development work.

### **Do not over-promise**

Be honest about what the project can achieve and likelihood of delivery.

### **Face-to-face, conversational, informal engagement allowing opportunity and a safe space to talk about wider issues, will offer the best results**

Relying on a survey or a one-off focus group will often not give you a full or rounded picture and may only engage people who are already supportive of your project, rather than helping you to reach new audiences.

**Capturing your engagement**

Always take note of the people you speak to as well as key points from your conversations. This will inform the design and delivery of your project and evidence community needs and wants.

**Ongoing relationships**

Maintain the relationships and trust you build with your local community groups. Engagement should continue even after the project has been completed to ensure that the facilities work for the audience on a long-term basis and evolve to reflect changing needs.

If you want any further advice/ guidance or have any concerns in relation to undertaking community engagement, please get in touch.

(created using information from Football Foundation, online Community Engagement Toolkit)