

This is the fun part! Engaging the community and thinking of creative ways to involve everyone, not just the 'usual suspects', is fundamental to your Community Led Plan

Where to start

You will need to have a plan to involve different sections of the community in the process. This will include different age groups and people from all geographical areas of the community including outlying areas. You may want to involve businesses and visitors too.

People who don't readily come forward with their views often hold the opposite view to the people who do. Using a variety of methods (we recommend three different approaches as a minimum) to reach as many people as possible is very important.

For most Community Plan groups, a questionnaire is the core of their consultation (although it doesn't have to be!), but only using a questionnaire is always a bad idea. If you do, you'll only get the views of people who like to fill in questionnaires! Some people may simply be put off by the work involved or see it as a 'boring' looking document and think it's not relevant to them. Others may have difficulty with reading and/or writing.

It's not realistic to expect the majority of people to come to meetings or events about the Plan. You need to go to where people meet anyway. This could be the pub or school gate or organised groups and clubs. Groups like the W.I., Toddler Groups, Youth Clubs and Sports Clubs for example, can provide an easy way to talk to a larger number of people.

Keep track and keep talking

You should keep a record of the people who participate with some simple statistics on the numbers involved, their approximate age and area they come from. Collecting this information gives credibility to your plan and helps you demonstrate to service providers you want to influence that you've taken an inclusive approach.

The secret to a really effective consultation is making sure everyone knows what's happening. Letting people know what you are doing and when, and thanking them for taking part is a key part of the process.

Key questions to ask

Before beginning any consultation, you should always ask yourself these questions, the answers will help you decide what methods and techniques to use:

- Who are we consulting?
- What about?
- Why?
- Whose consultation will it be?
- Do people (and you!) understand the issues?
- When should it be done?
- How long will it take?
- Who interprets and sees the results?
- Are there any comparable results?
- What might happen as a consequence?

Plan, plan and plan

- Plan your consultation thoroughly and choose methods based on your existing knowledge of your community.

Use a variety of methods

- Not everyone will want to express their views in the same way, and some groups, young people for instance, may need a different approach.
- Some people may need additional support in order to express their opinions

Go to your community

- If people won't come to you, go to them by working with existing groups and organisations in your community.

Keep talking

- It's essential to keep the wider community up to date with progress and informed as to what's happening next.

Methods and techniques

Special Meeting

Invite everyone to a special event in a central, accessible location, with refreshments provided. Consider putting on an activity or workshops with facilitators to guide the discussion.

Suggestion boxes

Put these at strategic points around the village (pub, shop, village hall etc) and invite comments or suggestions.

Informal questions

Meet people in the pub, outside the school or a shop and go through a short list of questions on a clipboard.

Quiz night

Put on a fundraising Quiz Night and include a round on what people would do to improve their community with £100, £1,000 and £10,000.

Youth work

Contact a local youth work organisation to do some detached youth work with young people. A couple of sessions could get a range of useful views, and stimulate activity for future projects. Try providing a graffiti wall on which young people can write on a plywood "wall" about how they see their community

Competition for schools

Ask primary school children to draw pictures of good and bad things about where they live, and what they would like to see.

Photography or art competition

Run a competition for all ages for the best photograph or picture of the local area. Alternatively, run a 'best and worst' competition, or have classes like landscape, built heritage, people or wildlife.

Walkabout

Meet people and walk around the village with them, recording their views on improvements and problem areas.

Coffee Morning or Lunches

Put on a coffee morning or lunch for people to talk informally in groups about their concerns for the community, or what they value about living there.

'Then and Now' project

Working with a school or youth group, ask young people to talk to an older relative about their memories of life in the community. They can then report back to an open meeting, or the Steering Group, about what life was like then, how they feel about now, and what they would like for the future.



Consultation at 'Empowerment in Action' Conference - 2009



Bandleyside residents voting for projects at a 'Heart of Eden' Community Planning event - 2009

Useful websites

www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

www.acre.org.uk

More information

ACT Development Officers can offer further support and advice. A range of additional Guidance Sheets are also available on our website.

For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01228 817224 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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