

Collaborating and Empowering: a 'how to...' guide



What does Collaborating and Empowering mean?

In addition to **informing** and **consulting** with communities, there are two further areas which link with community engagement principles and practices to involve communities. Both usually relate to situations where there is an ongoing relationship with communities and community groups.

Collaborating means that an ongoing dialogue exists, where both sides recognise each other's role, and are able to honestly and openly discuss community issues and develop solutions which are fit for purpose. It is about collective problem solving, working with a range of people to address issues and agree ways forward. **Empowering** communities goes a stage beyond collaborating, where there is an element of power to be handed over to a community. This could be a decision on a budget, an area of service delivery or a transfer of an asset to a community for example. In order to achieve this, it is vital that the right skills and knowledge are held by the community, so there will need to be an element of "mapping" community capacity, and potentially training and capacity building work.

Why is collaboration important?

Collaborating with communities is important, as residents are more likely to engage and be satisfied with decisions that affect their communities, and their lives, if they are actively involved in the processes of local decision making. Collaboration is about building trust over a period of time, where honest, flexible and sustainable relationships are developed. Trust and mutual understanding need to be developed, and whilst there may be specific aims when starting with collaboration, very often additional outcomes can occur which are beneficial to both the community and people working with them.

Why is empowerment important?

Empowering communities can often be a progression from collaborative working. Empowered communities are able to make their own decisions, and have their own expertise and are aware of their assets. As with collaboration, empowerment is about an ongoing relationship with a community. When capacity is built within that community, the skills and potential of residents to be involved in decision making increases, and communities are more resilient, are more able to cope with challenges and changes and better connected.

Both collaboration and empowerment are important because they can:

- allow communities to believe in their own abilities
- enable a recognition of the strength that communities have
- lead to better decision making and more satisfactory decisions
- increase local democratic participation
- increase connections between people who might not get much opportunity to experience or understand each other's lives
- have a positive impact on resources

Collaborating, Empowering and Community Engagement

The process of collaborating and empowering communities is part of Community Engagement work. Community Engagement is about reaching people in a creative way, that reinforces what they can achieve, builds their capacity to be involved and leads to stronger and more connected communities.



Top 10 tips for Community Engagement...

1. Get to know and understand the communities you are working with...

- Communities can be geographic, be based on shared interest or experience, or identity – ensure you have an understanding of the communities in the area you want to work with; what they are passionate about, what keeps them together, and where they see themselves in the future.

2. Use an Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to work with communities...

- Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) focuses on the strengths and connections that exist in communities rather than data or statistics.
- ABCD allows us to identify the community assets that exist in all communities, which include people; organisations and groups; economic, physical and institutional resources; and the stories and culture people have
- ABCD allows us to “asset map” a community and then build connections between people and the opportunities around them

3. Use project management and project planning techniques...

- Use available techniques to agree shared visions and aims when working with communities; identify key people, commit the resources needed and develop and use action planning to move tasks forward.

4. Work with Equalities groups...

- The Equalities Act (2010) defines groups of people who often face discrimination in society and places responsibility on public bodies on how they work with them. The groups are defined as: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; gender; sexual orientation.
- Public bodies must give due regard to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relationships between those who share and do not share protected characteristics of the groups. Community Engagement can contribute in a positive way to addressing work with equalities groups.

5. Understand the roles and rights of Community Organisations...

- “Community organisations” is a broad term, which covers a wide range of different bodies from informal associations through to registered charities and companies, social enterprises and co-operative societies. Each body will have a different legal status, and their own management arrangements, which could be a board of directors, trustees, committee members, who make and take their own decisions.
- Community Engagement needs to take this into account, and recognise the independence of community organisations and their legally protected rights.
- Understand that people are usually operating in a voluntary capacity and have other commitments

6. Effective partnership working...

- Community Engagement builds relationships between people and partnership working is essential to this. Engaging with different partners and agreeing shared outcomes whilst respecting different agendas and viewpoints is an important factor in getting it right
- Partners often have different interests, but there is no reason why a shared outcome cannot satisfy everyone
- Pooling of resources and assets helps get things done more efficiently and often stops duplication

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7. Training and capacity building...

- Be prepared to undertake and/or deliver further training in Community Engagement. The Council's Community Engagement Team, can deliver bespoke training to both those working with communities and community groups, and people involved themselves in their own communities as activists.
- Capacity building of people's skills and abilities increases their ability to take part in civic life, feel more confident about who they are and be more resilient to change.
- Building capacity in communities leads to positive outcomes for all involved.

8. Be creative...

- All communities will have an experience of dealing with public bodies, often based on their access of service delivery; and your work with them may be the first time anyone has proactively engaged with them
- Be prepared to work in a way that engages people in a creative way, and builds on their interests and helps them achieve their own agenda
- Be flexible and actively listen to what people are saying

9. Make use of engagement and involvement methods and tools...

- There are many different ways of engaging and involving people, sometimes it relates to the issue you want to address, the resources you have, and what you need to achieve from it. Choosing the correct method for what you want will help ensure that people's time and effort, which is their most important resource, is used to maximum benefit.
- **Participation Compass** can help you choose a method that is right for you

10. Get us involved...

- The council's Community Engagement Team is a source of advice and support for Community Engagement work.

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