# Community Engagement Made Simple!

**A Brief Introduction to Developing**

**a Community Engagement Strategy**

**NORTHUMBERLANDCVA**

Supporting Communities, Enabling People

# Contents

## Introduction

This summary, produced by [Northumberland Community Voluntary Action](#), is designed to provide an overview of the options available to develop and implement a community engagement/ consultation strategy. The summary poses a number of questions that should be considered so that groups and organisations can work towards a strategy that best suits them. It strengthens their existing knowledge or provides learning 'on the journey'.

It is not definitive and there are links to further information which readers may find useful in developing a strategy that best meets their needs. It is important to remember that any strategy should be flexible so you can react to any changes, opportunities or issues that arise. All engagement methods have successes and failures so what may work in one instance, may not work in another. Be prepared to vary your approaches and try out different things.

The information in this Guide can be used by anyone with an interest in community engagement. For example:

- Community and voluntary groups
- Volunteers and community activists
- Statutory services such as local authorities or healthcare services
- Elected members, be they County, Borough, Town or Parish Councillors
- Charities, large or small
- Social Enterprises

## What are Your Objectives?

**What is the purpose of why you want to engage/ consult?**

- Do you intend to talk to people about a specific issue? Eg a new building, the existing community centre
- Do you want to focus on specific themes? Eg activities for young people, jobs/ training etc.
- Is this an open consultation to capture the general needs and priorities of local people/ local communities?

**Have you defined the scope of your engagement/ consultation strategy?**

- Will you be working within a specific geographic boundary? Eg. A community, an estate, a town.
- Will you be targeting specific 'communities of interest'?
- How flexible is your strategy? Are you comfortable to change/ amend it if necessary?
- What else is going on out there? Do other groups and organisations already have plans/ ideas? Would you be competing/ duplicating with others?

**Have you identified the stakeholders to engage/ consult with?**

- Local residents
- Local activists/ volunteers
- Local community groups
- Faith groups
- Ethnic minority and cultural groups
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations
- Public sector agencies
- Communities of interest
- Hard to reach groups and individuals
- People by demographic (age, sex, race)
- Wider groups and individuals who have an interest or a stake in what you are consulting about
- Local businesses
- Northumberland VCS Assembly

**You may have to consider safeguarding issues if you want to involve young people or other vulnerable groups. Think about other partners who can advise or support your engagement to do this. For example, VoiCeS Northumberland can provide advice and training on safeguarding.**

**Resources and Time**

- Do you know who will be involved 'on the ground'?
- Is it clear who will lead/ plan/ coordinate?
- Is it clear what the responsibilities are of all those involved?
- Do you understand what level of time and commitment others can give?
- Are the capabilities and limitations of all involved clear? Is there a need for support and training throughout the process?
- Can you call on the support and expertise of other organisations/ individuals?
- Have you agreed/ put in place deadlines and milestones to ensure things progress at the pace you require?
- Do you have a budget? Eg. Printing, stationery, room hire, events/ activities, training needs, expenses, buying in expertise etc.
- Have you fully costed out what you need for an engagement/ consultation exercise?

**How do you intend to communicate to people/ keep them informed?**

- How much publicity will you do at the start so that your target groups/ community know what is going on?
- How do you intend to keep people informed? Eg. Leaflets, meetings, website, social media, public meetings etc, VCS ebulletins.
- Have you thought about how you 'present' and share information? Have you considered the needs/ understanding of different audiences?
- Who will take the lead and be responsible?
- Who has the skills, or needs support/ training to do this?

## Community Engagement Approaches, Techniques and Resources

### Practical Community Engagement Activities

- Door to door surveys
- Surveys: hard copies or online
- Community events
- Informal 'street work'
- Targeted locations
- Facilitated sessions and focus groups
- Working in partnership with others. For example, youth groups, other community groups
- Creative approaches: Consider arts/ crafts based activities, using visuals etc.

Is it more effective to commission/ buy in expert support?

### Community Engagement Approaches

Do you have a wider understanding of community engagement methods? These could help you structure and plan how you go about things 'on the ground'. Some examples include:

- Asset Based Community Development
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Community Mapping
- Participatory Appraisal

Further information is available in the next section…

### Community Engagement Resources

There are a number of approaches and so much information out there.

- Here is a comprehensive list of techniques and approaches:

  Participation Methods

- A free guide to Participatory Appraisal has been produced by North East Social Enterprise Partnership:

  Participatory Appraisal Handbook 2014

- Other useful guides/ sources of information:

  [Homes and Communities Agency Community Engagement Guide](#)

  [Community Planning Toolkit](#)

- Look at Appendices 3, 4, 5 and Appendix 6 for a list of other resources:

  [Not Another Consultation](#)

- This is a good catch all guide about community work:

  [Community Work Skills Manual 2009](#)

- Community Development qualifications are also provided by a number of organisations. Locally, [Northumberland Community Development Network](#) runs learning programmes for community activists and workers.


Think about being flexible and maybe taking 'good bits' from a range of methods and use in the situations that best suit you!

**Gathering Your Evidence**

**Collating Information**

We have produced this [FACTSHEET](#) that gives guidance on data protection

When you have identified the methods and approaches you want to use, it's important that you capture information that will help you monitor, review and plan what you are doing. For example, keep records of the people, places, timings, accessibility of the sessions you've ran. It's not just about capturing the views and needs but also about:

- What was a good venue/ location?
- Did we go at the right time of day?
- Who did we speak to? Males, females, young, old etc.
- Are we missing out any groups, individuals, communities of interest?
- If there are difficulties, who can help us get to those we want to speak to?

It's essential to have a structure to your data capture and recording. For example, how do you write things down on the day? A standard form, scraps of paper?

Who writes up the information? How? On a spreadsheet or a database?

If challenged on your proposals, it makes life easier if you can access your original evidence and findings so you can justify what you want to do.

**Reviewing/ Analysing/ Prioritising your information**

- So what do you do with everything you've captured or recorded?
- Have you thought about how you are going to sift it, sort it into 'groups' or 'themes'?
- Who is going to be involved with this? Are they clear on what's expected of them?
- Do you have a decision making process to identify your priorities? For example, a scoring system, a voting system, agreement by consensus/ negotiation.
- How do you 'weight' priorities and decide why one might be more important than another?
- Are you sure a priority or activity isn't already available elsewhere? Can you justify there's additional need?
- Are you clear on what is within the capabilities of your organisation, and what is not?
- Have you thought about what you will do with issues beyond your responsibility? How do you influence those whose role it is to put some of the community issues into practice?
- How will you feedback and keep those involved interested?

### Next Steps

- What are the priorities of your organisation, based on the findings from your engagement exercise?
- How will you feedback and 'present' your evidence and priorities to a range of audiences?
- How will you put these into practice? Who are the essential people? What or where are the resources you need?
- Do you have clear timescales to put priorities into practice?
- Are there others to help you or take the lead in delivering some of the priorities?
- Who has responsibility to monitor progress? How will people be held accountable?

## Acknowledgments

www.nurturedevelopment.org/abcd-resources.html

www.abcdeurope.ning.com

www.participationcompass.org

www.nesep.co.uk

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/homes-and-communities-agency

www.communityplanningtoolkit.org

www.involve.org.uk

www.fcdl.org.uk

www.voices-northumberland.org.uk

www.ncdn.org

**Disclaimer:**

Northumberland Community Voluntary Action (the operating name of Wansbeck CVS) has tried to ensure that the information in this document is accurate. However, Northumberland Community Voluntary Action will not accept liability for any loss, damage or inconvenience arising as a consequence of any use of or the inability to use any information in this document. We are not responsible for the accuracy of the information in the links to third party websites or documents.

As this guide is unlicensed, you are free to copy and distribute the work but we hope that you will attribute 'Northumberland CVA' as the source.

However, you must check the licence terms of the copyright holders we have listed in 'Acknowledgements' and seek permission from the copyright holder if you wish to transform their work, or use it for other purposes.

August 2015

**For further information contact:**

**Martin Conway, Community Development Officer**

**Northumberland Community Voluntary Action**

**107 & 109 Station Road, Ashington, Northumberland. NE63 8RS**

**Tel 01670 858 688**

**Email martin.conway@northumberlandcva.org.uk**

NORTHUMBERLANDCVA
Supporting Communities, Enabling People