

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

There are many reasons why people don't engage with community consultations or initiatives. If you want to ensure that all sections of your community take part, you first need to understand those reasons and try to address them wherever possible.

Access and inclusion issues

SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Mobility issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chose accessible venues Provide information about access issues on fliers/publicity
Sensory impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing loops are available in many venues including village halls • Use microphones and P.A. systems (including roving microphone for audience comments)
Learning difficulties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide helpers to talk to people and write their comments if necessary
Carers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child/adult carers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider need for crèche facilities • Go to where people meet – e.g. school gate. • Provide other opportunities – such as web based responses or face to face interviews
Language issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research target community and involve support groups
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide helpers to talk to people and write their comments if necessary • Use phone consultation or face to face interviews
Minority groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve community leaders and/or support groups • Meet them on their own ground - in their own networks or support groups • Identify and address practical barriers such as language issues
Age related issues - both very young and elderly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet them in their own networks or support groups • Use methods that are tailored to their needs and interests • Use social media

SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Transport (lack of access to)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chose accessible venues • Go to where people already meet • Arrange transport to the venue • Time your event to coincide with availability of public transport • Use mobile displays in public places

Resource issues

SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Cost – of transport, childcare etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose easily accessible venues • Arrange transport to the venue • Go to where people already meet • Consider need for crèche facilities • Ensure there are no hidden costs to taking part e.g. purchase of refreshments or ticket fees. • Provide alternative methods of being involved
Lack of time/timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the timing of meetings and who might be excluded • Provide more than one opportunity to get involved e.g. weekday evening and Saturday morning drop in. • Provide a drop in session • Go to where people already meet e.g. outside shop or school gate • Piggy back on to other community events • Provide alternative methods of being involved e.g. web based consultations, use of social networks, online discussions, teleconferences etc. • Make your event relevant and worthwhile • Focus on the task and keep to time • Allow people to be involved at the level at which they are comfortable • Allow substitution of reps at events and meetings
Lack of digital access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide alternative methods of being involved
Lack of meeting space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the pub, church, school or a barn
Lack of energy/motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree tangible goals and a clear plan of action • Maintain the momentum • Keep meetings short and action focused • Early successes • Ensure that volunteers feel valued



SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Lack of/poor communication channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing communication methods - map linkages between groups • Decide who you want to communicate with and how best to reach them • Tackle gaps in communication channels first! • Use several means of communication • Put most resources into most effective channels • Use informal communication networks - e.g. at school gate or on Twitter
Lack of skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Training • Do a skills audit to find out what skills already exist within your community
Consultation/meeting overload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear communication to avoid confusion • Understand each other's processes/timetables to avoid unnecessary clashes • Investigate opportunities for shared working/events if appropriate

Clash of culture

SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Different perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share knowledge • Identify common ground and start from there. • Use tools to help the group understand underlying issues and agree possible solutions • Use an external facilitator • Agree ground rules • Share success stories
Different styles - Formal/informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree ground rules - negotiate for a mid position • Arrange meetings in neutral venues • Adopt meeting format and room layout to bridge between different styles • Avoid difficult language and jargon • Explain acronyms
Cultural/religious differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve community leaders and/or support groups • Arrange meetings in neutral venues • Meet people on their own ground - in their own networks or support groups • Identify and address practical barriers such as language issues • Respect each other's differences, identify common ground and start from there



SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Geography - non overlapping boundaries, remote communities, poor communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map out the geography so everyone understands the differences • Use the issue as a focus for discussion and action

Power dynamics

SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Inequalities in power/resources/influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree that, within the group, everyone has an equal voice and responsibilities • Use a facilitator to help bridge between groups, empower individuals and encourage learning between groups • Ensure events are designed to level out differences in power • Avoid difficult language and jargon
Challenging individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree ground rules • Agree communication procedures • Strong leadership • Adopt clear decision-making processes • Use targets and action plans to move things forward • Training • Distract the individual by setting tasks • Hear their voice but don't give too much airplay • Coaching to address behaviour
Vested interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declare interest at outset • Agree ground rules • Use '6-thinking hats technique' to see each other's perspectives • Encourage honest and open dialogue
Dominant leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design room layout to encourage all to participate • Meet on neutral ground • Use more participative approach to empower others to have an equal say • Be clear about style of chairing or leadership that the group will be comfortable with • Agree ground rules
Power struggles (too many chiefs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify joint task they can work on together • Use an external facilitator • Use a more participative approach that empowers others

Mistrust and apathy

SPECIFIC ISSUE	STRATEGIES TO CONSIDER
Apathy/disinterest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree a positive, shared vision • Enough positive voices! • Keep momentum going • Early success • Celebratory events • Regular communication about what is happening and progress
Lack of awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop communication strategy • Consider different communication methods • Social media • Publicise successes • Use local networks to raise your profile
Cynicism - 'we've tried this before' - 'it won't change anything'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive case studies • Commitment from all involved to creative approaches and new ideas
Mistrust/fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunity to disclose issues early and address them – good communication • Use an external facilitator • Keep momentum going • Build trust through small successes • Celebrate successes • Good publicity
Established residents v newcomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline to show history that all can share • Identify common ground and start there • Build a shared commitment to future of community
Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exists until there is successful collaboration! • Negotiate for win-win
Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that this is normal at certain stages • Use an external facilitator • Use more participative approaches in meetings
Volunteer burnout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree tangible goals and a clear plan of action • Ensure that volunteers feel valued • Run 'volunteer of the year' event • Maintain the momentum • Keep in mind what motivates them • Allow people to be involved at the level at which they are comfortable

Designing consultation and engagement projects

A range of other guidance notes on community consultation can be found on our website at: www.communityfirst.org.uk. Community First's EnAct service also offers advice and support on designing and implementing community consultations and initiatives, tailored to your needs. Contact us for further details.

Further information

For further information, contact us at:

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EnAct is a service provided by:

