
Tips for successful community projects

Determining community needs

Identifying what your community needs is an important first step in planning a project. Projects that have the full commitment and buy-in from the local community have a greater likelihood of happening and succeeding.

Consulting with the community also validates the need for whatever you are considering and will help shape the overall solution.

If you want something to happen in a community, you need to tap into the energy and passion of locals. These tips will help ensure your consultation is effective.

1. Be inclusive

The more people you reach across the community, the better picture you will have of current conditions. So, make sure your process is broad and inclusive. You can also find out what needs have been identified/prioritised by other groups and what projects are in progress. You don't want to compete, but you might be able to collaborate.

Reach out to various groups, such as:

- Parent or school groups
- Sports leagues
- Local businesses, Chamber of Commerce, etc.
- Community groups (e.g. Neighbourhood House, Progress Associations, etc.)
- Students and young people
- Ethnic associations
- Local not-for-profit organisations
- Local government
- Members of the target population (if a specific beneficiary group has been identified)
- Health care providers
- Service clubs (Rotary, Lions, etc.)
- Members of the media (both to participate and to promote the process)

Handy tip

Use simple methods like social media, flyers and newsletter articles to invite community members to participate.

Go beyond your comfort zone; provide surveys in languages other than English, if relevant, and work with service providers to ensure people with disabilities can share their opinions. If you're choosing a meeting location, make sure it's close to public transport, has disability access and is welcoming. A public library, community centre or school are good options.

2. Ask your community

Before you start, make sure you research what has previously been asked of the community. Consult local authorities or other groups about what data they may already have and ask them to share the outcomes.

If you do need further input, there are many options. Surveys are one of the easiest ways to identify local priorities. Make sure you include open-ended questions for people to offer their observations and express their concerns and ideas.

Community forums, neighbourhood meetings and focus groups are also good ways to get more detailed information about the community's perceptions.

SurveyMonkey.com is a good tool for creating surveys.

Templates for community activities are also available at **wufoo.com**. If you're collecting personal information, make sure you understand privacy requirements.

Handy tip

People have different preferences for sharing feedback, e.g. written, one on one in a public forum (virtual or in person), so offer multiple methods of engagement.

3. Identify issues and concerns

Questions to ask in your forums, surveys or groups might include:

- What things does our community do well? What are our strengths?
- What do you think are the opportunities or most pressing issues in our community?
- Which members of our community does this affect? Please rank in order (greatest impact to lowest).
- What can be done to address this problem/opportunity?
- Who can help us to do this?
- What are some of the challenges that might make this hard to achieve?

Keep up the momentum

Getting a full picture of the needs of your community takes time. Be patient and persistent. It's important to give this step the time it deserves to ensure that your project targets the right issues.

If you already have a good idea of what needs to be solved in your community, lead the forum or survey with some background on the proposed issue and seek feedback on it.

4. Analyse what you learn

Review and analyse the feedback. What issues emerged as the most important to the community? What changes could make a real difference? Are there common themes? How does it compare to what you thought? Be prepared for your solution to change – or for the problem or opportunity to be smaller or different from what you originally thought.

Make sure you report back to the community.

5. Make a plan

Once you've gathered as much input from the community as possible, it's time to take make a plan. You'll need to:

a. Find your focus

There will undoubtedly be lots of things you could do, but narrow in on what's most important, and what you have capacity to do. It may help to look at other communities that have faced the same problem(s) or opportunity to see what they have tried.

b. Engage key players

Gather enthusiasts, leaders, volunteers and champions who'll participate in and promote your project.

c. Talk to other groups

Who else is working on this issue, or something similar? Look for opportunities to collaborate.

d. Create a project plan

Decide what your group can realistically do to address the issue. Make a plan that includes:

- The activities you will do.
- How you will measure your success.
- How much will it cost?
- How long will it take; can it be done in phases?

e. Create an evaluation plan (See the 'Measuring your project's success' help sheet)

What does success look like? What will you measure in order to know whether or not you've had the desired impact?

f. Raise the money and resources (See the 'Getting started in fundraising' help sheet)

Start thinking about fundraising. How much money will you need? What other resources can you use, e.g. time, community members' skills, donated, shared or recycled equipment? Are there local funding sources you can tap into? What are the most appropriate fundraising techniques (events, grants, donations, sponsorships, or a combination) for your project?

g. Keep community members informed and involved

Keep in touch with the people and community groups you engaged with in developing the project. Let them know what the wider community thinks and how you plan on addressing the issue(s) that emerged. Use existing channels that you know work. Perhaps start a web page or Facebook page so participants can continue to engage with your project. Enlist local media to cover your project and provide regular updates so people can see your progress.



Learn more at auspost.com.au/local-support

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