

# CREATING CONNECTIONS

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# 1. ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

## How can I encourage people to participate in my organisation?

The best way to encourage people to participate is to foster a sense of identity for the organisation through supporting the development of shared values, beliefs and interests. Build a feeling of connectivity through memories, storytelling, reflection and dialogue. Members should have a sense of ownership and belonging to the group, while understanding its capacities and boundaries. Take time to celebrate your achievements, ensuring there is acknowledgement of the collective group effort as well as key individuals, and introduce rewards and incentives where appropriate. Encourage social interaction and networking events, and create opportunities for members to diversify their skills and reach their full potential.

To attract new members to your organisation, or to retain current members, consider what they might be looking for in the group. Their motivations might include developing connections with people of similar interests and making friends, or the opportunity to learn new skills. You can find more information about volunteer recruitment strategies in *Handbook 3*.



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## How can I connect & collaborate with other similar organisations?

It is often an excellent idea to work with or learn from other similar organisations. Don't re-invent the wheel, you may be able to collaborate on projects, share information and resources or apply for grants together.

The first step is to make a network map for your community or the project you want to undertake, by identifying the stakeholders who might assist, be affected or be opposed. This could include other non-profit groups, politicians, businesses, government departments and local residents. List all stakeholders, and for the most important ones, consider their goals and expectations from you, as well as what you need from them for the project or your group to be a success.

## How do I develop a formal partnership or network with another organisation?

If you decide to develop a structured partnership with another organisation, firstly undertake an internal capacity audit, to make sure you have well-defined goals and values, a realistic understanding of group strengths and resources, an ability to manage the project or relationship, and the skills for communication, conflict management and decision-making. Next assess the level of partnership that is needed. This could range from simply sharing information to setting up a legally separate network. It's important to define structures and processes at the beginning, so that everyone is on the same page about their responsibilities for attendance, how decisions are made, processes of communication and agreed ways of working.

Finally some effort needs to be made to sustain the partnership in the longer term. Even if the partnership is for a one-off project, spend time evaluating and documenting the partnership benefits, outcomes and learnings in order to inform future collaborations. Ongoing working relationships with other groups will require some time invested in managing the relationship, re-evaluating ways of working where necessary and promoting the partnership both internally and externally.

## 2. COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

### What do you mean by community capacity building?

The concept of capacity building came about in the 1990's with the realisation that poverty and sustainable development could not be addressed by technical and economic solutions alone. As funding through grants has been largely replaced by more demanding contract and service level agreements, many small voluntary organisations have struggled to find the capacity to continue with their outreach and advocacy activities. Community capacity building aims to improve and maintain the well-being of a community by leveraging all of the assets, structures, networks and knowledge within the community to their best effect.

For some this is simply another name for community development, but for others it is a new approach with an emphasis on place-based solutions, community networks and partnerships, and engaging all segments of the community, including business and government. Capacity building encompasses community education and technical skills development, enhancing individual skills and knowledge, and building organisational capacity and fostering local community networks. It strengthens the ability of community organisations to define and achieve their own objectives, and encourages and supports continuous learning and improvement in individuals, organisations and the society they seek to change.

### What are the main elements of effective capacity building?

**Asset focus:** The first step of community capacity building is to identify and map the assets and strengths within the community, including individuals, associations, business, government and physical assets. Determine what commitments, skills and resources each has to contribute and gain from working in partnership.

**Relationships and networks:** Utilise, build and extend on networks between these assets, exploring opportunities for collaboration and valuing the variety of informal networks that already exist.

**Inclusion:** Engage all groups, especially those who have been marginalised, geographic communities and communities of interest and identity. Emphasise peer-sharing, learning and validation.

**Place-based solutions:** There must be a strong internal focus that emphasises bottom-up initiatives that are embedded in and driven by the community. The community ideally should develop a shared vision and set directions, recognise their shared history and make collective decisions.

**Sustainability:** To be sustainable, capacity building must be community driven and multi-faceted, taking a holistic approach to issues and using strategies that make a long term difference.

## What approaches to capacity building might be effective in my community?

**Supporting and resourcing community leaders:** it is important to identify resource and support catalyst figures who act as community drivers and role models. Leaders need to be perceived as visionary in some ways yet pragmatic in others. They need to be action oriented while also facilitative in the way they work with their groups.

**Strengths based strategic planning:** developing a common vision of the future based on core values and what has already been achieved in the community can provide an alternative and positive than the traditional focus on issues and problems.

**Education programs:** capacity building should integrate the development of practical and technical skills alongside critical reflection approaches. Leading community members are also significant sources of local-level knowledge and inspiration and can act as mentors.

**Understand and work with group culture and styles:** for all stakeholders, consider their communication methods, how they view the world as a group, the stories they tell, the unwritten code of conduct, how they approach problem solving, and who is included and excluded. Groups that recognise, work with and challenge their own culture can heighten their effectiveness.

## What are some of the challenges or pitfalls of capacity building?

While capacity building may be seen as a universal panacea to issues confronting communities, there are many complex concepts involved that are often oversimplified. The importance of power and the challenging realities of inequality may be overlooked. Community leaders do not always represent the whole of their community. One size does not fit all, as each organisation and community is unique, and sometimes there is a negative side to strong local networks which might be exclusionary or inward looking.

There are no quick fixes – capacity building when done effectively is ongoing and resource intensive. The focus on local approaches may fail to acknowledge that sometimes there are not local solutions, that social structures or institutions may be the critical factor. Due to funding arrangements, community organisations can also be more concerned by service transactions and competitive tenders than with the long term development of the community and clients.

Photo: <http://on.fb.me/1HLQqVi>



# 3. COMMUNICATION & MARKETING

## Why do we need to have a communication plan?

Effective internal and external communication is important for all sizes of community organisations. Organisations operate most effectively when communication flows easily between staff, volunteers, members and clients, so that everyone has enough information to perform their roles and make decisions.

Ideally you should have a communication plan, even if it is very simple: what are you trying to achieve with your emails, newsletters, events and flyers? Your communication plan should also allocate who will be responsible for internal and external communications and spell out what they will do and how frequently.



Photo: [flic.kr/communityspaces/5435835223](https://www.flic.kr/communityspaces/5435835223)

## What do I need to know about getting my message across effectively?

Written, oral and verbal communications are affected by your tone, gestures, facial expressions, the method of communication, what is communicated or left out, and your individual style. People will often believe your tone and body language more than your words.

Your messages are also delivered to an audience who may have preconceived ideas or feelings that will influence their understanding of your message and their response. For example, people process information in different ways, and if you appreciate their point of view you can get your message across quickly and accurately. Auditory people are oriented to sound and language, and learn more quickly by listening. Visual people perceive the world primarily through sight and learn most quickly by seeing information such as diagrams, maps or photos. Kinaesthetic people experience the world through feelings and touch, are very sensitive to the world around them and may have to do something themselves in order to understand it.

## Are there email etiquette rules we should be following?

Yes! Ensure you have a central email address for your group so that there are no issues when the contact person leaves. If confidentiality is an issue, don't use email. It is not secure. Be careful about forwarding or printing out emails as recipients will be able to see the entire string of emails and everyone's contact details which the original sender might not want. Be careful of content: laws that apply to harassment, discrimination, defamation, obscenity also apply to emails.

Don't treat email too casually, or use it to let off steam. Make sure you are calm and composed when sending emails as they are a permanent record of what you say. Send emails only to readers with a legitimate need for your information. Use appropriate greetings and sign offs. Consider the limitations of emails – no one is under an obligation to check their email regularly, so if you need an immediate response then pick up the phone or schedule a face to face meeting.



## Help I'm scared of Twitter! What technology should I be using?

Today, technology and social media go hand in hand with communications. You may feel overwhelmed with the social media and technology options available to you, but bear in mind you don't need to use them all. Decide which ones serve your purpose the best and then use them well. Keep things simple whenever possible.

Many small to medium community organisations will need to have a website. You can pay to have one created for you or do it yourself on a free online platform. Your website is the online face of your organisation so ensure the picture it paints aligns with your purpose and mission. Some of the other useful online tools you may want to use are: mailchimp (for creating mail campaigns and e-newsletters); surveymonkey (for easy to use online surveys); skype (for free video and audio calls anywhere in the world); and google drive (for document storage and rosters).

Social media is also used frequently by many community organisations. It is an easy way to get your message out there, but it is most effective when you put some time and effort into targeting your messages and streamlining a social media plan. Facebook is usually used for engaging with members, getting feedback, posting events, photos and snippets of the work you are doing. Twitter is essentially a tailored news service, so is most effective for promoting the news, events, messages and resources of your group. LinkedIn is a professional networking site where you can also post within groups of similar interest.

## How can I engage effectively with the media?

The key to engaging with the media is to consider what they can get out of your story or message: a good news story, a cute kid, shock value, photo opportunities. The greater the number of people who might be interested in it, the bigger the news story. Bad news is bigger than good news, particularly confrontation. Quiet, substantial achievement or straightforward good news is hard to sell, but if you can give a human face to the story it has a better chance.

In developing a media strategy you need to consider:

- the message you are trying get across – the shorter the better;
- a good location for your media event that is handy for the media to attend and has a good visual;
- a good time of day, usually mornings or weekends; and
- an articulate spokesperson who is also available after hours by phone for follow up calls by the journalists.

Develop partnerships where possible with local journalists and media outlets. Potential outlets include TV stations, major newspapers, online news websites, radio, local newspapers, school magazines, church and community group newsletters. Don't be upset if they don't run your story. If you find it difficult to get take up on your story, you can always pay to run an ad.

## 4. FUNDRAISING

### Show me the money! Where can I access funds for my organisation?

You can raise money for your organisation in many ways: grants, donations and bequests, paid work, a membership scheme, corporate partnerships, subscriptions, fundraising events or sales. In order to determine the best way to acquire funding for your organisation you should:

- Identify your objectives and the activities you plan to undertake to meet them
- Determine what skills and resources you already have access to, and which ones you will need to bring in either by paying for or through volunteers, borrowing or developing.
- Identify potential sources for acquiring each resource, trying not to rely too heavily on one source.

### How do I go about writing a grant application?

A grant is money that is provided by a funding body in order to carry out work that benefits the community and meets identified community needs. A grant application requires the applying organisation to identify a project that fits within the funding body's criteria, and propose how they will meet this need or overcome the problem. Key websites that list available grants can be found in *Handbook 6*.

When submitting a grant application:

- Be clear about the purpose and objectives of your organisation, including how and where it operates, what it does and who are the clients or target group.
- Match your project to the real needs of the community, showing the benefits it will bring.
- Be sure the purpose of your application matches the funder's criteria and guidelines.
- Develop a plan for the submission which includes your aim, objective, strategies for achieving these objectives, tasks, communication strategy, timeline, celebration and evaluation/ performance indicators. Gather and attach all required supporting documentation.
- Prepare a budget outlining the cost associated with the project, including in-kind donations and providing quotes where possible.

### How do I attract & retain corporate sponsors?

A sponsorship proposal is generally an unsolicited request for a partnership or resource. A community organisation might approach a business with a proposal to help fund a project that will benefit both the community and the corporate. Businesses may be able to assist with financial sponsorship or in kind support such as printing, marketing or legal advice. Try to choose businesses that have a natural fit with your cause or a specific project.

When approaching corporate partners you might benefit from offering them specific packages: for example they pay so much money and receive a certain amount of promotion, or they are the sole sponsor of a particular project. Make sure everyone in your organisation is on board with what you are offering to corporate partners, such as signage, branding, media and public relations.

It is important to nurture your relationship with your sponsors, particularly corporate sponsors, by continually communicating your project outcomes and photos and ensuring they know what they are getting for their money. It is best to work with partners who are a natural fit for the work you are doing and have similar values.



Photo: <http://picography.co/photos/working-outside>

## 5. INNOVATION

### **We are often encouraged to be innovative in our work. What does this mean?**

There is a renewed focus on innovation in the community sector, largely due to changes in the nature of the non-profit sector, funding availability, technological advances, the changing nature of connection and belonging and the demands of a new generation of community members. In this age of uncertainty and constant change, organisations need to be innovative to work effectively and thrive.

To be innovative means to interrogate your practice and open your organisation up to critique. The most resilient of groups will work on both the strategic and the practical levels, spending time reflecting on how the group works, interpersonal relationships, the impacts of current trends and new opportunities. Don't be afraid to consider how the group could work better, and whether it is achieving the genuine impacts it set out to achieve. If there is a gap between these ideals and the status quo, critically question your current practices and investigate different perspectives and ways of working.

### **How can our organisation be truly innovative?**

Innovative organisations should aim to:

- Harness small groups, pods or hubs that are formed around passion and learning and draw resources and people as necessary
- Foster local initiatives and action that learn from others and are interconnected as required, but are grounded in the local and work with the unique attributes of that community
- Use narrative, storytelling and creative processes to investigate different ways of working
- Make use of opportunities, forces of attraction and serendipity
- Investigate new platforms and digital strategies for making a difference
- Engage those from marginalised communities in ways that value their input and voice
- Work with the enormous energy of a new generation seeking a form of serious engagement

Some examples of innovative practices in the community sector are social innovations such as microfinance fair trade, social enterprises and socially responsible investing. Positive deviance is another innovative approach which aims to discover existing solutions to complex problems within a community. This process uncovers local individuals or groups whose uncommon behaviours and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their peers, while having access to the same resources.









