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Space to Connect

Resources for Community Organisations



Space to Connect

- Space to Connect is a partnership between DCMS and the Co-op Foundation and aims to unlock the potential of community spaces
- Leeds Beckett University and Locality are Space to Connect evaluation and learning partners.
- We have captured the experience of Space to Connect projects and learning from the programme in a number of tools and reports
- They will be available on the LBU website.



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Communities Connected; digital resources for community organisations working online

- Aims to support organisations continue their role as connectors and supporters of local communities online
- Covers; the challenges, advice and tips, policy context
- Developed through 16 Government and Civil Society organisations and in partnership with New Philanthropy Capital

Digital technology is not a replacement for in-person contact but offers a set of tools to connect people when in-person contact isn't possible or desirable.

Using digital to connect with communities

- Great examples of how community activity has been adapted to go digital. This includes; creative projects, befriending, online advice services.
- Start with people's needs! E.g. some people with autism may prefer digital activities whilst for others digital activities might increase their sense of isolation
- Resources include:
 - Tops tips for running remote workshops
 - Developing services via WhatsApp
 - Delivering arts activities online
 - Digital youth work

Choosing the right platform

- Includes an assessment of different formats
- Online message chats
- Online platforms with other functions such as note taking, project management tools and scheduling tools

Addressing Barriers

- Organisations and schemes helping people access equipment
- Free online resources to increase skills, confidence and knowledge
- Tutorials and guides on various tools and platforms including making video calls

Improving accessibility and user experience

- Enable people who have benefitted from going online share their experience
- Ensure instructions are clear, simple and jargon free – and in languages spoken locally!
- Guides for helping people with learning disabilities get online

Being safe online

- Safesurfing – targeted at people with learning disabilities
 - ThinkUKnow – internet safety for children
 - Age UK – online safety for older people
 - Email safety tips
 - General tips for staff and volunteers on running safe online sessions
- Enable security features that come pre-set on most digital platforms, set passwords for video calls, and enable a 'waiting room' feature to check the identity of anyone joining an online call before letting them in.
 - Ensure online conversations are moderated and understand reporting and blocking procedures of any online platforms you are using.
 - Be mindful of platforms like WhatsApp where all members of the group can access phone numbers. Make sure users understand the risks before agreeing to use a certain platform, and that they know how to leave a group or block users if required.
 - Ensure that you have a reporting procedure in place in case of a security breach that might compromise users' information.
 - It is important that staff use work accounts rather than personal accounts to communicate with users—for example, you should create an organisational Facebook account rather than staff message users from personal accounts.
 - Check the age-restrictions, and appropriateness, of any platforms you are using to communicate with children or young people—for example, Facebook can only be used by young people aged 13+.

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Commissioner discussion tool



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Understanding how to work with community organisations: a discussion tool for commissioners

- Provides a format for a structured discussion at place level to consider the contribution of community anchors in addressing the challenges communities face
- Helps thinking and planning for building resilient communities, addressing inequalities and adding social value

We suggest this briefing is put on the agenda at a strategic place level meeting

Evidence review

Covid-19 has provided further evidence of the potential of community action and of the importance of harnessing the power of communities.

“The scale of community action in the UK since the start of COVID-19 pandemic has been significant. Community based organisations, national charities, mutual aid groups ... have stepped forward to support those made more vulnerable by the pandemic.11 ”

Local community organisations were the quickest to respond to urgent local need. They;

Took the risk of repurposing existing resources and funding to respond to local needs.

- Coordinated local volunteering responses providing an important interface with citizens and mainstream provision.
- Developed new ways of communicating and connecting with communities and agencies creating ‘cogs of connection’ and joining individuals with services.

Challenges

Community organisations' rapid response to the pandemic had often left them in a financially weakened position.

Reasons for this included:

- Their funding was already only just sufficient prior to the pandemic;
- The funding base had been weakened because other revenue streams, such as community cafes or renting out business space, had reduced or disappeared completely.

Are new ways of working e.g. digitally compounding existing inequalities, excluding the most vulnerable?

What should local systems be doing?

A greater focus on places as the centre for economic and political thinking and action

Effective response of local community organisations should be used as an example of the positive impact these organisations can have.

This evidence should be used to integrate community organisations in to place-based systems such as health and care

Needs to be a shift in what a 'good' local system looks like

What needs to happen?

- A better understanding of the role and contribution of community anchor organisations
- A review of the current status and funding of community organisations with a focus on marginalised communities.
- The offer of financial support for community organisations is a mechanism to ensure that their experience and knowledge of their communities is not lost

Key questions for commissioners

- How is the voice of community organisations heard at a strategic level and in key system plans?
- How is funding coordinated between key commissioners?
- What further actions need to be taken and who is responsible for these?

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