

TOP TIPS FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

There are a variety of reasons why you may want to engage with local individuals and the wider community. It maybe to gather thoughts and views on a new initiative or project. It could be to better connect with the community to see how you can contribute to the collective community assets. Perhaps it is to gain a better understanding of who is on your doorstep and who may have different skills sets that you are missing or could benefit from in the future. Or may simply be to remain as transparent as possible about who you are as a club and what you do.

Whatever your reason, understanding how to create an environment where open mindedness and opportunities to ask questions forms the basis of your engagement, will put you on a good footing with your local community.



Below are some top tips on how to conduct meaningful engagement.

1. Be present

Try not to assume that because you want to understand more about an individual, group or organisation that they should come to you. Visit them to gain a better insight of their environment while getting a feel for their culture and community.

2. Be flexible

Try to avoid going into conversations with set ideas or presumptions on what others think or feel. It is also important to remember that not everyone will know about you and your club, so you may have to give some more insight into who you are and what you do within the community before you find out about others.

3. Ask good questions

Try to use open ended questions to capture the true thoughts, views and opinions from individuals and organisations. You are asking these questions to find out more so be brave in following this through, you never know you may be presented with new ways of thinking or different concepts that you hadn't considered. Try to ask at least one question before moving on to the next topic.

4. Avoid giving answers

Closed questions or attending any session with answers already prepared to your questions may demonstrate to individuals and organisations that you are not truly wanting to find out their thoughts and suggestions. This could negatively affect conversations and future connections.

5. Avoid technical jargon

No one likes being thrown off a conversation by technical jargon or acronyms. Keep the conversation simple.

6. Use a variety of listening methods

Small group and one-to-one conversations are great methods of listening however they are not always the most efficient. You can explore 'listening' through questionnaires, surveys and social media polls but be careful not to solely rely on these methods. Remember relationships are built on personal connections, trust and communication.

7. Understand the motives

Individuals and organisations engage best when they have a common or invested interest. Try to find this out beforehand if you can and then use this as a way to communicate and connect. Individuals in communities where there is a common interest are more likely to act, which in turn can be exceptionally meaningful and powerful.



8. **Keep the conversation alive**

Ensuring that you keep individuals and groups updated and connected through conversation will demonstrate that you value their opinion and want to keep them a part of the journey.

9. **Ask, ask, ask**

Asking and inviting are some key actions which excites those within the community. Showing individuals that you want to listen and find out more about them is important. Asking them to 'join you' and showing that you 'need them' makes individuals feel that their involvement is wanted and that their views are valued.

10. **Balance professionalism with personability**

A professional approach demonstrates standards and values but if delivered in the wrong way can unintentionally build barriers. Keep the conversation real and personable. Find out about the person first before their community involvement, strengths etc.

One of the key foundations which underpins all these top tips is trust. Trust is a key element of creating and nurturing engagement. Building trust is a continuous process that takes time and energy, and different stakeholders will come with varying levels of trust and willingness to trust. Acknowledging this and working together with stakeholders to build trust, is vital.

Remember

The above is initially aimed to help you and your club create meaningful engagements locally. However, you may find that, you are consulted with or in attendance at an event where you are being engaged with. If you do attend any such event, take the time to reflect on how you were engaged with. How did they connect with you? How did their engagement make you feel? What did you not like? What maybe disengaged you? Gathering personal experiences, along with some of the suggestions above will help you create the best environments for when you and your club engage.

