Community Engagement and Events

This section of the event planning toolkit provides guidance on the issues to consider when planning and designing your event in relation to community engagement. It focuses on quality and effectiveness, process planning and designing engagement tailored to the particular issue, level of participation to be achieved, timeframe and range of stakeholders affected.

1. Understanding key Stakeholders

When planning an event there are a number of stakeholders involved and impacted by your event planning process. Many of these stakeholders can be involved in a positive way, however, there are often negative implications of hosting an event within a community. These negative impacts are reduced greatly, if effective communication and understanding of their respective needs are understood from the early planning stages.

Who might be the key stakeholders in a community:

- Local residents in the direct and surrounding areas.
- Local community groups and clubs
- Community Councils
- Chamber of Commerce/Trade
- Communities of interest
- Local businesses

2. Early Communication

Early communication with these key stakeholders is a priority to ensure that communities feel both well-informed and also included within your event planning process.

In these early, initial stages of communication it is very important that you clearly demonstrate your event objectives and how you look to engage with the community in a positive way. If there are associated negative impacts with holding your event, try to approach with some positive impacts your event might also have on the community.

There are numerous ways you can effectively and positively engage with stakeholders to include them in your event planning processes and overall delivery of the event.

Some examples include, but are not limited to:

- Use local suppliers/contractors.
- Offering temporary working or volunteering opportunities for local community
- Donation to local clubs in exchange for service/volunteering
- Offering discounted or free tickets (where applicable) to local community

For certain events that have a more significant level of disruption to local communities, it is important to engage and notify communities of this as early as possible and ideally – where possible try and include them in the planning process.

Disruption from large scale, or more complex events may include:

- Road Closures
- Temporary marches
- Use of public parks and paths
- Local services being used/abnormally busy.

Where there may be closures, use of paths and disruption to the local community an effective initial conversation point is to approach the community council who will be able to filter through any required information to residents. Having a single point of contact that's able to feed information through a community is a far more effective approach than trying to approach various stakeholders.

That being said, for any local businesses that may be impacted communication with these organisations is particularly important. When planning you need to understand the impacts your event will have on business operation in the area. For example, some organisation may rely on road access that be affected and sufficient, prior warnings of diversions need to be in place. Additionally, local cafés and restaurants, in order for an event to achieve maximum economic impacts, these organisations need to be prepared for a potential increase in demand of their products.

3. Communication Methods

As we've discussed in section 2, one of the most effective ways to engage with a community is through the community council or for businesses to approach them directly. However, there are numerous other ways you can effectively communicate with communities, including:

- Posting in community social media groups
- Posters in local businesses or notice boards.
- Signage on streets (essential well in advance if any closures are in place)
- Contacting local authority who can share message through their communication platforms (generally for larger scale events)

4. Monitoring & Evaluation

Following on from your event, it is really important to gather feedback from the local community as early as you can. Ensure that you have an appropriate post-event feedback form that's ready to go prior to your event.

The form should be clear and easy to use for maximum engagement, whilst offering a detailed analysis of how your event was received within the community and ways you can improve in future

years. Examples of post-event feedback forms can be found in the Event Organiser Toolkit (insert link).

An effective way to distribute this would be through the same means you initially made contact with the community. Again, using the community council and local social media groups/pages can be an effective way to share this information.