1.5
Community Engagement

Every member of your community can be a valuable member of society with something to contribute. Community Councils should attempt to engage with a wide range of people to create a large diversity of perspectives and insights which can help the Community Council to achieve more. Engaging community members in making decisions is also likely to make them more pro-active about their community's needs.

Community engagement is about building open and honest relationships between citizens and the Community Councils, based on mutual trust.

Engagement can range from providing information about current work or projects, to consulting on particular issues, to full empowerment whereby the community has decision-making powers. Some of the engagement needs to be ongoing and some of it might be short-term or one-off events.

Community Councils, by law, must be non-discriminatory. They should be welcoming, open and non-judgmental toward all citizens, including youths and individuals from hard to reach or minority groups. Nobody should be blocked from Community Council activities.

Engaging with a wide range of citizens will make the Community Council a better representative of the community and make both other local communities and the local authorities more likely to work with and listen to the Community Council. Community Councils should also try to engage with citizens even if they are not eligible to become an official member of the Community Council (e.g. children).

There is no one correct way for a Community Council to engage with its citizens and what works for one part of the community might not reach other members of the local area. As representative voices for their communities, it is important that Community Councils do not just share information, but also gather the views of local citizens.

To make sure that the Community Council engages with as many as possible, it can be useful to consider combining or using many different approaches. In some cases, it can be useful to meet face to face at meetings and events, other times information posters and flyers in public places might be the right approach and in many cases it is worth considering using digital resources such as surveys or social media to reach an even larger or maybe a new audience. Many minority groups will also often have an online presence which makes them easier to approach.

Digital Engagement

The wide access to internet has helped many Community Councils create new ways to engage with people. Community Councils can now keep in touch with members of the community through email, newsletters, websites, and social media. These methods of digital engagement are easy to use, and most of it is free or very low cost compared to other forms of engagement. It can take some time to build an audience for a newsletter or a social media account, but the time invested compared to possible reach is often very low compared to other forms of engagement. For spreading information, it is more flexible and cheaper than print media but it should not just replace traditional engagement methods. Different channels work well with different audiences.

Social Media Tools

Below is information on two of the most popular media platforms [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) – but there is a whole range of other tools such as [Instagram](#), [Flickr](#), [Vimeo](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#).

Facebook and Twitter allow you to share links to these other social media sites and web resources. It is worth thinking creatively about how you could best reach your community through sharing on several networks. It can be a bit daunting thinking about managing several accounts, but to make this easier, there are free social media management tools that you can use such as [Hootsuite](#) or [Buffer](#) which you can use on your PC or smartphone. These can also give you some insight into how often people reads or shares your content.

Social media site	How it works	Useful guide
Facebook	Facebook profiles can be created for individuals, groups, businesses, or to promote a cause. Facebook allows you to upload photos and videos, send messages, create events, and share 'statuses', which operate like microblogging	'Beginners Guide to Facebook' - basic guide from social media site Mashable. This is an easy to follow step-by-step guide to the main aspects of Facebook. 'What is the difference between a page and a group?' - Help to decide whether a group or page might be best for your Community Council
Twitter	Twitter allows you to post short messages, pictures, and videos, called 'tweets', which registered users can see. The shortness of the messages is known as 'microblogging'. It is a great way of keeping people up-to-date on your work, as well as learning about what others are doing.	'Getting started with Twitter' - Twitter's own guide 'Twitter for beginners' - a basic Twitter guide from social media site, Mashable
Wordpress and other blogging sites	Blogging is a great way to share information about the work of your community council as you can write longer content than on for example Twitter (Twitter can however be a good way to share the link to your blog). Wordpress can also be used a website	'Wordpress tutorial: a guide to Wordpress for beginners' - This guides explains the basic in setting up any blog and focuses especially on setting a blog up with Wordpress.

Building a Website

Creating your own website allows you to create the image you want for your community council and it can be very useful to have one place where people in your community know they can find information like news, events and contact details. Having your own website gives you the option to store a lot of information like minutes, pictures and documents and make it available to anyone who is interested.

A website works best when there are frequent updates and reasons for people to come back to the site, so remember to make a plan for who is posting and how you are going to get new content. It might be useful to have a couple of people who are able to post on the site, but they shouldn't be the only ones creating content. The best stories are created or written by the people who are most knowledgeable about the subject.

Some community councils use their website as a portal for other community groups and encourage them to share information on the community council website. This helps drive visitors to the site and can play a big role in making the community aware of the many ways the community council collaborates with other community groups.

A website can also work well alongside other social media. Many websites allow automatic posting of content across platforms like Twitter and Facebook and make it easy to share information among different audiences. You can also use the website to show your social media streams for members of the community, who might have an account on Facebook or Twitter.

All community groups wishing to create a website will need a web platform. Wordpress is free and simple to use, but there are many options available and it might be worth paying to register and host a domain for the community council if you do not already have one. Scottish Community Councils website have created a small series of video tutorials to help if you want to get started on Wordpress.

Using Video

Video is a great way to engage with people and it does not have to be complicated, expensive, or time consuming. Here are some ways you could use video in your community council's work.

- With the permission from those attending, you could film the community council monthly meetings, either in part or in full, and publish the videos. This allows the public who were unable to attend the meeting to see what was discussed. Likewise, you could create a summary video to accompany the minutes you publish, which could make the information more interesting.

- Show the community the work that your community council is involved in by filming at community events, even interview event attendees. You might already be doing something similar by taking photos at events and publishing them to your community council's website or social media pages. Posting videos can often hold people's attention for longer than posts with just text and images.

- Film short interviews of community councillors talking about why they joined the community council and what their role is. This could help to encourage others to get involved in your community council and can show that you are welcoming and transparent

- Sometimes funders will ask for a video to accompany a funding application. If you already have experience making basic videos you will feel more comfortable about getting your message across through this format, which will then be beneficial to your application.

Filming can be done on just about any smartphone or tablet, although camera quality does vary between models. To help you start creating your videos, we have put together a list of basic tips and, once you feel comfortable with the basics of filming, we have shared some ideas for making your videos even better.

Scottish Community Councils website have further useful information on using video and can be found at http://www.communitycouncils.scot/using-video.html.

Printed Material

Many people do not have computers or access to the internet, so putting eye-catching flyers onto a noticeboard or an advert in a community newspaper are simple ways of engaging with people who might not see the information otherwise.

Get in touch with your local newspaper or community newsletter and ask if they will mention the next community council meeting or upcoming event in their publications. Creating relationships with the local press can help you get community events and campaigns featured and promoted, which will help spread the word about the great work the community council is doing.

Creating posters or flyers has always been a great way to reach individuals in your community who you may not meet normally. They can be used to provide information on the work your community council is currently doing, signpost to surveys or online information, or to advertise an upcoming event or project in the local area.

Contact local libraries, cafes, shops and other public spaces in your area to ask if they will display your posters. You can also leave piles of flyers for individuals to pick up, deliver them by post or directly in mailboxes, or hand them out to passers-by in the street.

Office programs such as Microsoft Word or PowerPoint can be used to create posters, or for more advanced designs applications such as PhotoShop can be used. These are programs that cost money to buy, but there are also free programs such as OpenOffice or GIMP picture editor available online which have most of the same functions.

Face-to-face

Engaging with members of the community in person can show that community councils are approachable and it can also help raise their profile. Not all engagement has to be done in person, but being able to put a face to a name will not only help people recognise you, but also makes all other forms of engagement simpler and more trustworthy.

Face-to-face engagement can be practiced in a number of different ways; such as consultations, door-to-door campaigning, galas, and fairs. Events are a way of showing the great things community councils can achieve and might even encourage more of the community to get involved if they are inspired by what is happening in their area. Community councils have to represent the views of their community, so consultations and surveys are very important to obtain the views of citizens.

Some people may think attending a monthly community council meeting is too formal or they may be unable to attend for a number of reasons like disability or ill health, or because of work or family commitments, so it is important to think of different ways to involve everybody in the area. Organising a fair or gala day can also help bring the community closer together and can be a great way of gathering the views of the citizens in an informal setting.

Working with or attending other local voluntary groups' meetings can be a great way to consult with a variety of people in the community. This can also raise awareness of community councils and encourages other local groups and organisations to collaborate with you on issues important for the community.

When organising any kind of engagement activity, from going door-to-door to running an informal event, it is important to keep in mind what you want to achieve from the activity and who you want to engage with. Involving the community in the event organising process may help them feel ownership towards it, and therefore encourage others to get involved. Being inclusive is a fundamental part of community councils, so make sure that everyone in the community feels included and able to participate.

The Scottish Government has created a useful guide (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/can-do-guide-for-organisers-of-voluntary-

events/the-can-do-guide-to-organising-and-running-voluntary-and-community-events) on organising voluntary events, which contains advice about licensing and insurance. If you are interested in learning more about ways to engage with the community through face-to-face engagement, Scottish Government also has information on how to engage with the community in several ways, including through focus groups and surveys. (http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/HowToGuide/Techniques)

National Standards for Community Engagement

When engaging with communities it is important to follow the guidelines set out in the National Standards for Community Engagement.

The 7 national standards are in the following diagram.

(Ref: Scottish Community Development Centre, 2017)

Other information and tools

The following organisations have useful information and tools to help with any community engagement you wish to undertake.

Scottish Community Councils

Scottish Community Council website has some great example of community council's representing and engaging with a diverse population www.communitycouncils.scot

Scottish Community Development Centre

The Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC) supports best practice in community development and is recognised by the Scottish Government as the national lead body for community development. The organisation works across sectors and with a wide range of professions to support community engagement and community capacity building in any context and at strategic and practice level. Information and advice can be found at www.scdc.org.uk

VOiCE

VOiCE is planning and recording software that assists individuals, organisations and partnerships to design and deliver effective community engagement. The system will enable all users to use a common approach for analysing, planning, monitoring, evaluating and recording community engagement.

VOiCE has been developed and supported by the Scottish Government to implement the National Standards for Community Engagement.

To use voice or for help with community engagement visit www.voicescotland.org.uk

Knowledge Hub

This is a useful platform to learn and share with Community Councils in other areas, you will have to register to access groups and forums at https://www.khub.net/