BREAKING BARRIERS

How to get people involved in their community
Breaking Barriers:
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For nearly 60 years, Keep Britain Tidy has inspired people to take action in their communities. At a time when public services in the places we live and work are being severely cut, we decided it was more important than ever to find out what motivates people to get involved in improving the places they love.

Our aim was to understand the nation’s feeling of responsibility towards building and supporting their local community. So, in 2011, we launched a research programme to find out what factors genuinely trigger or prevent people from getting involved. We wanted to understand and explain why some people have no interest in their community, while others will dedicate their lives to improving it.

We also wanted to know what motivates some people to become community leaders and how to encourage others to follow them.

Our research shows that people view ‘engagement’ very differently. We were quickly able to identify six different groups of people within the community. These range from our heroes – the community activists – to those who don’t really have any interest in getting involved. By gaining a better insight into their personalities we have been able to create a guide to each of the groups. Through in-depth research, we have been able to identify the true triggers and barriers to people participating in their area.

Our guide shows the types of activities and initiatives that will appeal to each group. It demonstrates the most effective messages and approaches to mobilise each segment of people. It also looks at the best ways to minimise their fears and concerns.

With this greater understanding of the different groups of people, it is far easier to target each segment in order to maximise involvement. It also helps us to understand how we can inspire and encourage people to take a leading role in projects. It has enabled us to provide our top tips for mobilising each part of the community.

Our research and recommendations will enable you to break down the barriers and get everyone involved in their community.
The story so far

By conducting this research in 2011, Keep Britain Tidy aimed to build an accurate assessment of people’s feelings towards community involvement. We wanted to see how likely members of the public were to get active in their neighbourhoods.

We very quickly came to understand that ‘engagement’ does not necessarily mean the same thing to all people. For many, engagement is a simply awareness and understanding of a certain issue. Some don’t consider people to be engaged unless they are actively participating in tackling an issue. For this reason, we wanted to examine everything a person could consider to be an act of ‘engagement’. Central to this was giving the people we spoke to a chance to define it for themselves.

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In the first stage of our research we used a ‘quantitative segmentation’ approach. This method enabled us to identify adults across England according to their likelihood to get involved in their community. This approach divides target audiences into groups that have common needs or shared desires. Activities or services can then be designed that appeal specifically to each group. This significantly increases the likelihood they will be successful and improves an organisation’s ability to effectively communicate with their target market.

At Keep Britain Tidy, we really value this technique. It helps us to understand all our audiences and how to talk to them. We can use this approach to increase community engagement. By targeting and tailoring our approach for each group we can increase our chances of getting people involved.

Defining ‘engagement’

Belief

- Those who support an issue, but are not actively involved

Awareness & understanding

- Those who do not negatively impact on an issue

Active participation

- Those who are actively involved – ranging from volunteers, to leaders and community champions

How we started

After studying a nationally representative sample of more than 900 people across England 1 we identified six different groups of people. This approach divides people into groups so we could create comprehensive profiles of each group.

Overwhelmingly, this initial exercise told us that people were motivated to get involved in activities when they were asked by people they already knew. This ‘human touch’ was vital in getting people to participate.

But we still wanted to know why people feel the way they do about participating. So, in spring 2012, we decided to build on the existing research. We wanted to understand people’s motivations and their fears, their rational and emotional explanations. This would equip us with the knowledge of when and where to target our efforts.

We also wanted them to find out what makes somebody a community leader. What makes someone organise and lead activities, as opposed to just joining in?

One of our priorities was to understand the community leaders – our heroes – a little better. We wanted them to share their stories with us in their own time and at the exact moments when they felt like talking. To do this, we asked a number of leading community figures, who already worked with Keep Britain Tidy, to share their experiences.

This method allowed the participants to focus on their experiences in the moments that held the most meaning for them. They were also able to upload videos and audio diaries while they were working in the communities. They took pictures of the people or things that frustrated or motivated them most. They interviewed friends and family.

What happened next?

In the end, they told us everything we needed to know about what inspired them to lead activities in their community.

We followed this fortnight of in-the-moment research with six creative workshops - one with each of the six groups already identified. Using a good mix of people, from a wide variety of backgrounds, we talked at great length with each of the groups about their own experiences and what, if anything, was currently holding them back from getting involved. We played some games to tease out more emotional responses and we listened as they spoke to one another about their experiences.

All of this culminated in a richer and deeper understanding of each of the six groups or segments.

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1 The most fruitful sources of information for encouraging engagement: 92% said that hearing about opportunities from someone they already knew. This ‘human touch’ was vital in getting people to participate.

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3 903 telephone interviews were conducted with the adult population of England during March 2011. Nationally representative quotas were set on age, gender and working status.
An important exercise for us was to find out how people define the terms ‘community’ and ‘engagement’. We deliberately separated the terms to enable participants to arrive at their own definition of ‘community engagement’.

“Getting involved and sharing the benefits of interacting together.”

Descriptions of community range from the tangible - a group of people, friends and neighbours that you know - to something more akin to a feeling, a spirit or a sense of belonging. It is the latter that proved to be more of a hook for people. It is this feeling that people aspire to and it is this feeling that people tend to long for when they feel like they don’t have it in the places where they live. And it’s this feeling that can become addictive.

What we discovered is that, for most people, the true definition of community engagement involves participation. It is very firmly about doing something together with other people. It starts with a desire to get involved and to make a positive difference.

“Active involvement in a community.”

For some people, engagement is a mindset. It is about demonstrating a level of awareness of the issues by not negatively impacting on them. Usually this would be done by maintaining acceptable behaviour e.g. not littering. On occasion, it might also extend to encouraging others to change their behaviour.

For others, engagement is about knowledge or access to information. People generally agreed the more informed they felt on key issues the more they understood how they could help. Some of this relates to people’s sense of confidence that they have something to offer.

Many of the descriptions we collected suggested that feelings of empowerment are essential to getting people to act. Education or increased awareness took people to a level where they showed real interest and desire to get involved and make an impact. Empowerment also led people to involve others, such as friends and family.

Engagement is primarily about action. Having the right mindset and knowledge, this leads to people feeling empowered and taking action.

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How people get involved

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Stages of action

Mindset

Not negatively impacting the issues and a burgeoning interest in them

Knowledge

Knowing what’s going on and how the issues affect an area

Empowerment

Wanting and feeling able to impart knowledge to others

Action

Getting involved in a practical way to tackle issues

Once I’m over the initial barrier of confidence in myself, it’s a case of having the knowledge and finding out more.”
With all the research participants, we explored how they became involved. This enabled us to uncover the triggers and barriers to participating in community activities.

It is essential to have a good understanding of these factors if we are to encourage and motivate people to get involved. It also means we can address any concerns or fears they may have.

“It’s the difference between expectations and choice. For me expectation says, ‘this is a job’. Choice tells me. ‘this is volunteering!'”

“If someone I know asked me to help, I would.”

“If you are part of a bigger group you can get more done. It makes you feel part of something. It makes you feel like you are being responsible.”

1. Fun!
   Getting involved can create a buzz people get addicted. It is a feeling which people enjoy and triggers them to come back for more.

2. Easy access
   Community action is something that happens locally. People are far more likely to feel motivated if an event is on their doorstep or at least near where they live.

3. Incentives
   This could be anything from getting to enjoy the outcome of their work, a cup of tea or gaining a skill.

4. Interests
   People are much more likely to get involved in activities that feel like a small extension of something they do already. For example, litter picking while walking the dog.

5. Networks (social)
   It’s all about who you know. People are much more likely to get involved when they know other people or when they can go with people they feel comfortable with.

6. Sense of belonging
   Community action gets people working together. People feel part of a movement which they can be proud of.

7. Recommendations
   The human touch is a key trigger. People are far more likely to get involved when they have been asked by somebody they know.

8. Well-organised
   Time is precious. Think about the logistics that people need to know. Without knowing the details, people may be reluctant to turn up.

Triggers

“These people are just trying to boost their own egos.”

“I don’t want to be seen as a do-gooder.”

1. Perceptions of time and commitment
   Many agreed that if they really wanted to engage in activities they would make time.

2. Stigma
   There are poor perceptions of those who engage in community activities. This can act as a significant barrier to getting involved for many.

3. Fear of failure
   Self-doubt can put some people off getting involved. The fear of having nothing to offer makes some potential volunteers stay at home. Organisers need to reassure participants that they have something valuable to offer.

4. Apathy
   People need to have a genuine interest in a project or initiative. Without this it is very difficult to inspire them to get involved. Often people will only participate if they stand to gain or lose something.

5. Red tape
   People tend to believe that in order to conduct (and sometimes participate in) community engagement activities you will need to jump through a lot of hoops.

There is a real tension here. Red tape and bureaucracy is extremely off-putting for many, yet organisers need to acknowledge care for health and safety. The welfare of those giving their time is essential.

6. Not connected to community or issue
   If people don’t feel part of their community or affiliated with an issue, they will not be motivated to get involved.

7. Unrealistic aims
   Organisers need to set achievable aims. People are far more likely to get involved if they think they can make a real difference. A specific and realistic target allows people to see their success.

8. Lack of clarity/organisation
   Poor organisation and lack of detail puts people off.
The six different groups all demonstrate varying levels of involvement. From those who engage a great deal in activities to those who don’t unless, perhaps, there is something in it for them. Although the six groups are all distinct, our research shows some of the groups share some characteristics. The diagram below shows how some attitudes and behaviours overlap. This means we can simplify our communication strategies around three main approaches. Broadly-speaking, messages and appeals can be targeted to:

1. Those who are already open to engagement
2. Those who are ‘on the edge’
3. Those who do not generally think about getting involved

What do the segments share?

What do the segments share?

Many similarities

Some similarities

Few similarities

Meet the different groups

The six different groups all demonstrate varying levels of involvement. From those who engage a great deal in activities to those who don’t unless, perhaps, there is something in it for them.

As mentioned, one significant problem to getting many people involved in their communities is image. There is a poor perception of those who participate in projects in their neighbourhoods. To some, those who get involved are seen as ‘do-gooders’. Others worry about what people will think. Young people may see community activities as ‘uncool’. There may also be a stigma attached to wearing a tabard, as it can often be confused with Community Punishment.

“I don’t want to be seen as a do-gooder.”

An image problem

Most likely to engage in community activities

Least likely to engage in community activities

Meet the different groups

Who you’re probably speaking to now

People on the edge of engagement

Something might trigger their interest one day

Community Spirited 16%
Social Selectors 17%
It’s Not You, It’s Me 14%
Show Me The Way 15%
On My Terms 18%
What’s In It For Me? 21%

33% 29% 39%

What do the segments share?

Many similarities

Some similarities

Few similarities

Decreasing community engagement and desire to engage

Within this scale there is a ‘tipping point’ where people can be triggered from apathy into action.
Here is our quick guide to each of the groups. It tells you what you need to know to ensure the community activities you are organising will appeal to each of them. It will also allow you to target specific initiatives at the most appropriate audience, maximising your chances of success every time.

### Community Spirited

- **Communications and messages**
  - Tap into the ‘guilt’
  - Appeal to ‘buzz’ of being involved
- **Recommended approach**
  - Align with lifestyle
  - Align with existing social activities
  - Tap into passions and interests

**16% of the population**

- **I would like to walk through the park everyday and be able to enjoy the benefits of my labour!”**

### Social Selectors

- **Communications and messages**
  - Emphasise social aspects and ‘togetherness’
  - Use a social element as an incentive e.g. BBQ, tea and cakes
  - Keep it local
  - Tap into how participants will benefit from the activity
- **Recommended approach**
  - Be selective - align with limited passions and interests
  - Make it social - meet people and make friends

**17% of the population**

- **I would like to walk through the park everyday and be able to enjoy the benefits of my labour!”**

**HEADLINES:**
- Have time on their hands...
- ...but more selective about activities
- Limited interests or ‘passions’ to tap in to
- Seek to strengthen sense of belonging...
- ...and engagement breeds sense of ‘togetherness’
- Social aspect is a strong motivator (emotional)
- Being able to benefit from an activity is important

**HEADLINES:**
- Always responsive, but not always actively seeking
- Find it hard to say ‘no’
- Strong sense of belonging / community
- Feel a responsibility to ‘give back’
- Already busy!
- Lots of interests or ‘passions’ to link in with
- Guilt a strong motivator
Open to engagement
Significant confidence issues – fear of failure
Likely to want personal benefit (e.g. social, reward)
Needs clear parameters and instructions
Need reassurance (e.g. personal contact)
Easy and enjoyable activities are most attractive
Competitive angle could increase interest

Need charismatic and engaging leaders
Poor perceptions of those who engage are off-putting
Keen to align with current passions and interests
Competitive angle could increase interest
Highly unlikely to go to an activity alone
Opportunities should be prescriptive
Recognition is a key motivator

“T”。There’s a grey area. A lot of people just aren’t very informed. A lot of people aren’t thinking. They’ve got busy lives”

Communications and messages
• Reassuring with explicit expectations
• Be encouraging – You can do it!
• Appeal to desire for competitive and fun activities
Recommended approach
• Offer something with reward or recognition
• Be prescriptive and make it easy

Communications and messages
• Challenge poor perceptions of ‘engagers’
• Describe (personal) benefit of engagement clearly
• Make it simple and fun
Recommended approach
• Be prescriptive and ensure it is well-organised
• Smaller, less well-established groups are preferable
• Try to incorporate existing social networks
On My Terms

“I work. I haven’t got much time to give to anything else. The issues my local community raise I believe are petty and I can’t support them”

Communications and messages
- Challenge poor perceptions of ‘engagers’
- Show they will lose something if they don’t engage
- Well timed communications can get a quick reaction
- Everyone has a role, everyone is guaranteed feedback

Recommended approach
- Remember they are drawn to activities that tackle loss
- Demonstrate negative personal impact if they don’t get involved

What’s In It For Me?

“If it’s out of sight, you’re probably not going to get involved are you? You’ll be thinking I shouldn’t need to do that”

Communications and messages
- Challenge poor perceptions of ‘engagers’
- Be reassuring and prescriptive
- Demonstrate the benefits of work that’s already begun

Recommended approach
- Keep it hyper-local
- Offer a reward or heavy recognition
- Ensure there is a personal benefit

18% of the population

HEADLINES:
Cynical – “What’s the point?”
Need to witness impact of engagement
Need to maintain momentum
Incentives are the main motivator
Some confidence issues
Want engagement to feel good
Unlikely to seek opportunities
Social aspect is appealing for some

21% of the population

HEADLINES:
Unlikely to get involved
Engagement is reactive rather than proactive
Only interested in things that impact them
Urgency is key motivator
Inspired by potential loss rather than opportunity
Let people dip in and out
Hold negative views of those who engage
“Productive” outcome essential

18%

21%
Communications and messages that work

With each of the groups there are key messages that appeal best to their motivations and that most effectively overcome their barriers. These tend to be the same for the groups which are more involved and similar for those who are ‘on the edge’. There are different triggers again for those who don’t normally get involved. Their involvement is only normally sparked when they stand to gain or want to save something important to them.

Existing social networks are also vital. Community leaders and ‘first followers’ – those who are happy to be among the first to sign up to a project – are highly likely to spread the word and bring others with them. This can have a snowball effect – leaders and first followers can inspire those who are committed to the cause, who in turn bring along people from their own traditional social networks, such as family and friends.

Emphasise the social

Make the need explicit

Emphasise the importance of their role

Inspire – tap into interests

Appeal to ‘buzz’ of involvement – make them feel special/valuable

Align with lifestyle

Offer reassurance and support

Clarify their expectations

Bring friends and family

Encourage them to come for a trial run

Demonstrate strong leadership and organisation

Provide key contact – enable ‘warm-up’ conversations pre-activity

Risk/loss aversion

Top in to key local issues

Timely

Generate/activate peer pressure

Incentive/reward

Highlight transient commitment acceptable

Reassure

Emphasise the importance of their role

‘Bring friends and family’

Timely

Incentive/reward

Highlight transient commitment acceptable

Reassure

Across the board, logistics are always important

The snowball effect

Existing social networks are also vital. Community leaders and ‘first followers’ – those who are happy to be among the first to sign up to a project – are highly likely to spread the word and bring others with them. This can have a snowball effect – leaders and first followers can inspire those who are committed to the cause, who in turn bring along people from their own traditional social networks, such as family and friends.

It is important to recognise those further from the centre of the snowball are less likely to be tied to the project. There may be question marks over whether they will continue participating. This may depend upon the person who is acting as a ‘bridge’ to the initiative.

Three key factors to always consider for every initiative are: Incentives, personal benefit and impact
Always consider who, what, when and where? Make it easy for people to get on board by providing all the information they need.

Our research shows detailed information on the logistics is vital in the decision-making process. The more organised an activity appears to be, the more comfortable people will feel about choosing to participate.

It is therefore essential to provide clear, concise and accurate information as soon as people start to show an interest. Delivered well, this information will build a sense of trust and will make it much easier for an individual to eventually make the decision to participate.

Who? Knowing who is behind an activity or initiative reassures potential participants. Provide a telephone number, email address and contact name so that outstanding queries can be addressed personally and outside of ‘office hours’.

“Sometimes I think people just think someone else is doing it. You don’t need me.”

What? What is expected of the participants? What is the goal of the activity? Will they have to spend any money? Be explicit and promote choice and flexibility.

Where? Where an activity takes place is likely to have a significant impact on desire to take part – local is king! Not only that, but think about how far the participant has to travel, if at all, to get to the activity. This is important as it contributes to financial concerns people can have.

When? When will the activity happen? How much time will they be expected to dedicate? Do they have to come back again or can it just be a one-off?

Providing answers to these questions will alleviate many of the more practical concerns people tend to have about opportunities to get involved in community activities.

Purpose: Why do you need me? People who are on the edge of getting involved frequently decide not to participate because they lack the confidence to say they have something to offer to community groups and organisations.

People really need a sense of purpose, a call to action. Our research suggests potential participants benefit from being able to see how their contribution will really add value. With this in mind, organisers of activities need to be clear that a project is not just a concept or idea, but a very real activity with a specific set of tasks. Organisers also need to demonstrate how all of these tasks add up to an extremely positive outcome that will benefit the individual, as well as the wider community. It is also vital to make clear the goals will only be achieved if people participate.

Answering the unasked questions

Organisers also need to answer the questions that people may not want to ask, but need in order to make a decision whether to get involved. So, how can a wide variety of individuals really help? What mix of skills are you looking for? How can different people contribute? Is what people have to offer going to be enough? Tell them it is! Reassure them.

“Even if they are only going to tell me what’s on the poster again, I’d like to be able to speak to someone.”

Something in return? Always think about what you can offer participants in return for their time. This may be tea and cake, a new friendship group or a sense of achievement. For some social reward is essential. For others skills development is a major motivator. Particularly at a time when jobs are hard to come by, great volunteering experiences can make a huge difference to a CV. Community projects give volunteers the chance to learn new skills, which they can put to use in a new job. Don’t forget to think about how an initiative or project may equip people with new skills and tools that can be really useful and valuable to them.

“If I can get something to put on my CV, that would be great. I’d be more likely to do something if I thought I was going to learn something.”

The logistics: What people really need to know to make a decision

How to spread the word

The main ways to communicate these messages are identical across all the groups. A ‘hands-on’ approach to recruitment is the most successful way to do this. Unless people are actively seeking opportunities (and this is very rare) they need to be alerted to the possibilities of getting involved and that they could have something to contribute through face-to-face encounters.

Word of mouth is key because people are far more likely to engage in an activity if someone in their existing social network is participating or has participated or is leading/organising the activity.

Witnessing the impact of activities encourages people to participate. Community groups should be prepared to converse with interested parties as they work – this is very fertile ground! We can call this ‘witness recruitment’.

Local communications opportunities (including local papers, community websites, local radio and so on) will attract those actively seeking opportunities, but this is not a foolproof way to sustain engagement and there is a lot to cover (logistically) if you are to pull in the more hesitant crowd.

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How to spread the word

The logistics: What people really need to know to make a decision

How to make it work

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How to make it work

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Inside the mind of a community leader

Community leaders come in all shapes and sizes, but they share some key characteristics:

- **Positive mental attitude (PMA)**
  - An undebatable ‘can-do’ attitude is evident in all community leaders, and this is maintained with a genuine enthusiasm for what they do. It’s all about the positive mental attitude!

- **Task drivers**
  - Community leaders tend to like to get things done! As a result, their efforts to recruit others tend to plateau very quickly as they return their attention to the task at hand.

- **Busy, busy, busy**
  - Community leaders lead busy, full lives, but time is never a barrier for them. If they really feel like something needs to be done, they will find the time to do it.

- **Natural leaders**
  - Community leaders believe in leading by example. They are confident and passionate and they are simply not comfortable asking others to do anything they are not prepared to do themselves.

There are several different ‘tipping points’ that inspire community leaders into action. While some are driven by experiences, others tend to get more involved at certain life stages.

- **LIFESTAGE**
  - In particular, retirement and having children

- **HEALTH**
  - Problems with their health can get them more time and more perspective

- **DESIRE**
  - To expand and/or improve social networks

- **EXPERIENCE**
  - Something to bring me closer to a cause that matters to me

- **ALIGNMENT**
  - With existing hobbies and interests

- **Selfish do-gooder**
  - A lot of community leaders will tell you they do what they do for selfish reasons. When they really think about it, their primary motivation is that it makes them feel good.

- **Frustration is fuel**
  - Any frustrations they might have with the local area fuel their actions rather than act as a barrier to a positive experience of where they live.

- **Feedback loop**
  - They are sustained by positive feedback which can readily turn one ‘dip’ into engagement into many. Feedback is essential to keeping their momentum going.

“Feeling helpless is the worst feeling in the world. Doing something helps.”

“You’ve got to be confident and have organisational skills. It can be stressful!”

Confidence is key

Our heroes are confident and enthusiastic guides. There is a lot to do, but they have the passion and drive to get things done.

Frustration is fuel

Any frustrations they might have with the local area fuel their actions rather than act as a barrier to a positive experience of where they live.

Selfish do-gooder

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The buzz of involvement

What seems to sustain community leaders though, is a desire to get the ‘buzz’ of being needed, feeling useful and giving something back.

- **LIFESPAN**
  - In particular, retirement and having children

- **HEALTH**
  - Problems with their health can get them more time and more perspective

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- **EXPERIENCE**
  - Something to bring me closer to a cause that matters to me

- **ALIGNMENT**
  - With existing hobbies and interests

Interestingly, community leaders are more often motivated to maintain rather than create. They want to maintain standards, services or places and will not stand by if they perceived issues are starting to affect the things that are most important to them.

Getting others involved

Community leaders agree that people need to have a personal investment in the activity they are organising before they will contemplate getting involved, but that recruitment is ad hoc at best.

Most tend to use their own social networks to get people on board. Some have tried advertising and have had limited success, but they all agree personal contact is best. Many stay alert while out and about so they can chat with interested passers-by. This is witness recruitment in action.

“It has to be personal. We’ve tried advertising and it doesn’t work. We talk to them – put them at ease.”

“I just use my Facebook. I get people I know to ask people they know.”

It is essential to remember, community leaders are task-driven. They will only spend limited amounts of time and energy getting other people involved. And, perhaps because it is such a challenge, they do not see increasing participation as their main responsibility.

One significant exception is when people are new to an area. Community leaders talked a great deal about joining activity when they were new to an area, to seek like-minded people.

1. **LIFESTAGE**: In particular, retirement and having children
2. **HEALTH**: Problems with their health can get them more time and more perspective
3. **DESIRE**: To expand and/or improve social networks
4. **EXPERIENCE**: Something to bring me closer to a cause that matters to me
5. **ALIGNMENT**: With existing hobbies and interests

Catalysts for action

There are several different ‘tipping points’ that inspire community leaders into action. While some are driven by experiences, others tend to get more involved at certain life stages.

It’s essential to recognise that community leaders can get addicted to this ‘buzz’ from getting involved. For many, the positive feeling they gain is a bit like a drug!

“You get a lot from it. It’s very self-rewarding, I crave it!”

A powerful motivator

Community leaders are also significantly sustained by positive feedback – this is a powerful motivator. Great feedback is likely to turn one ‘dip’ into more sustained activity. Feedback is essential to keeping their momentum going.

“Feedback is essential to keeping their momentum going.

“In a way, it’s selfish! It gives me a real boost when people tell me what a good job I’m doing.”

Getting others involved

Community leaders agree that people need to have a personal investment in the activity they are organising before they will contemplate getting involved, but that recruitment is ad hoc at best.

Most tend to use their own social networks to get people on board. Some have tried advertising and have had limited success, but they all agree personal contact is best. Many stay alert while out and about so they can chat with interested passers-by. This is witness recruitment in action.

“It has to be personal. We’ve tried advertising and it doesn’t work. We talk to them – put them at ease.”

“I just use my Facebook. I get people I know to ask people they know.”

It is essential to remember, community leaders are task-driven. They will only spend limited amounts of time and energy getting other people involved. And, perhaps because it is such a challenge, they do not see increasing participation as their main responsibility.

One significant exception is when people are new to an area. Community leaders talked a great deal about joining activity when they were new to an area, to seek like-minded people.
Be explicit about everything!
Our time is precious. How can we expect people to make decisions without a very specific idea of what is expected of them? Think logistically and emotionally – what is it people need to know? What are they likely to want to know to help them take the first step to getting involved? A point of contact for any questions prior to the activity is essential for catching anyone ‘on the edge’. 

Align activities to interests and passions
With a bit of imagination, most opportunities can be aligned to people’s existing passions and interests. Get people involved by ensuring they feel as though they are having fun or that it is a small extension of something they already do. Examples include kayaking while cleaning waterways or walking your dog while picking up litter in the park.

Align opportunities to skills and development desires
Attract people to opportunities to engage in much the same way you would try to attract them to a job. Relate it to their skills and reassure people they will be able to stay in their comfort zone while gaining experiences that will enrich their CVs and feed their personal development. Take their expectations seriously.

Social media as a tool
Community leaders often use social media to tap into their existing social networks. This is a distinct activity though and it is rarely used to sustain activities and encourage feedback. However, as a tool to improve people’s experience of getting involved, social media is ideal. It can generate both user and ‘engager’ content. It injects fun and creates challenges. Just remember the 1% rule. You can only ever realistically expect 1% of social media users to create new content. About 9% will contribute, while 90% of people on social media will only ever read content.

Tapping into existing social networks
Community groups reach a peak fairly quickly. This is because community leaders do have a limited capacity to recruit. Volunteer coordinators need to continually source and coach new leaders. By doing this they can tap into new social networks, hopefully with varied interests and skills. These unconnected networks can then be pulled together to get everyone working towards a common goal. Different organisations and networks are then united to work on a central issue or problem, but using their different skills means many elements can be tackled at the same time.

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Barriers – from a community leader’s perspective
Community leaders perceive several key problems in trying to recruit new people to their group:

- Perception of time and commitment
- Stigma and the perception of people who get involved
- Apathy
- ‘Red tape’
- Some people are not social
- Accessibility and concerns over costs
- Selfishness
- Lack of community spirit

There were also further barriers they perceive which, despite never being mentioned, were expressed in some of their attitudes and behaviours:

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Our top tips
1. Be explicit about everything!
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4. Don’t assume anything and allow for preferences
In most cases, an activity could require people to fulfil any number of roles. Equally, people on the edge of getting involved need choice. Whatever possible, allow for people’s preferences (and personality types). Some people will be happiest on the phone, others will want to be out there doing something hands-on. Some people will want to work in groups, while others will prefer to work alone. Maxmise involvement by clearly defining the roles you need to fill before you try to recruit.
Recruit in social groups
A significant barrier for a lot of people is having the confidence to join in an activity, particularly when a community group is already well established. Go on recruitment drives that promote people joining as social groups. Recruit families, so people can bring their children. Recruit friendship groups and encourage them to do a little something before they go out for a beer!

Don’t over-estimate the role of the community leader
Community leaders can only do so much - it’s not a job! Their focus is not increasing participation; it is maintaining their already well-established networks and tackling their issues. Tapping into new social networks and finding new leaders is essential. Volunteer co-ordinators in specific areas will need to do this. This external input from an ‘expert’ or authority figure is invaluable in encouraging engagement and keeping it going.

Address the image problem
Both the groups and the community leaders agreed that people who get involved in activities have an image problem to contend with. There is a job to do here of challenging those perceptions. This might mean finding diverse examples of community leaders or exploring the motivations for getting involved that extend beyond the perception of ego boosting. Get these people to tell their own stories for you.

Accept that not everyone will be a leader
Community leaders have a very specific set of traits. The good news is this makes them easier to find. The bad news is we don’t believe that just anyone can be shaped and developed to become one. First followers (those people confident enough to be the first to volunteer) should be of equal interest to anyone trying to develop community activities. Who are the people confident enough to join in and how can you and your leaders tap into their networks too?