



Civic University
Network



**Institute for
Community Studies**

Case Study:

The Experience of Community Businesses During COVID-19

The Young Foundation

This project **explored the impacts of Covid-19** on community businesses in England, and the ways they adapted to respond. Using an online digital platform to capture the experiences of community businesses over a 12-week period from June to August 2020, the project was able to **identify needs and learning** from a **community of practice**.

Participants were tasked with **documenting and recording their experiences** during this period. Participating community businesses were asked to **complete specific activities** on a **regular basis** in order to gather insights on different issues they experienced during the lockdown, as well as capturing real time insights as the situation evolved. The tasks were hosted on a dedicated online qualitative research platform, Recollective, which allowed participants to share written responses to weekly questions and polls, as well as upload photos and videos that reflected their experiences. In addition to serving as a data gathering platform, Recollective also allows participants to see one another's responses and engage with each other through comments and discussion boards, **similar to a social media platform**.

Questions were designed around a new theme each week and **built upon the insights collected from the previous weeks**. The method allowed the stories and experiences of the community businesses to be captured over time and provided rich qualitative insights. The method was also well received by participants, with many of them expressing interest in being able to respond with greater depth and enjoying the social aspect of the platform.

A similar approach could be employed with local community representatives, third sector organisations, or businesses to explore their experiences and needs in relation to Covid and begin to identify how the university could support these. The conversation can evolve based on people's input, with the online platform acting as a space for ongoing communication between local partners.

Summary

Role of Community	Community involved in a more traditional sense as research participants, sharing information and insight in response to questions set by researchers.
Depth of Collaboration	Medium-low: the project themes and questions were set by the funders and research organisations, albeit with significant flexibility in the process for questions and direction to change in response to the information and experiences shared.
Lens	Needs & Experiences of a Community of Practice (i.e. community-owned businesses).
Inclusivity	Able to be inclusive of a broad range of participants who are part of the community of practice due to online format.
Data Generated	Qualitative data on experiences and perceptions, polls that reflect opinion and sentiment at given times.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Online format allows for easy participation for many• 'Social media' element of the platform can encourage dialogue between participants, which may encourage collaboration in future• Research/consultation is ongoing rather than occurring at one point in time- allowing for more nuanced information to be gathered and questions and lines of enquiry to develop more organically.• Process is much more like a dialogue between those involved than surveys or interviews.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motivating people or organisations to take part may be difficult if the outcomes are unclear- what's in it for people to give their time to this?• Ensuring the 'right' questions are asked- would need prior thinking between university and civic leaders to identify scope of the consultation