

Effective Community Engagement Toolkit



Civic University
Network



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Introduction

Context of the toolkit – how does this link to the ‘place agenda’?

How can universities involve people from their local community in civic activity? Community engagement is a term that’s difficult to pin down, but we define it here as the *active* involvement of ordinary citizens (as opposed to paid professionals) in solving local problems and participating in the civic life of their local area.

The desire for greater levels of participation of ordinary citizens in public life has grown considerably in recent decades. The involvement of those affected by the decision-making of large institutions in making those decisions is seen as a means of ensuring better outcomes. This is driven by concerns at the inability of centralised power and detached decision-making to achieve appropriate outcomes for communities. Moreover, communities and the diverse range of perspectives, knowledge and experiences they represent are increasingly seen as having value to add to public discourse, decision-making and problem-solving. Community engagement is tied up with calls for greater accountability of decision-making, improved representation of marginal groups, and the need for government and large institutions to better understand and reflect the experiences, sentiments, and values of ordinary people¹. In the UK these trends are perhaps most apparent to see within the localism agenda and attempts to decentralise and disperse power from Westminster to communities across the nation. Powers contained within the 2010 Localism Act afford ordinary citizens greater rights to take on powers traditionally reserved for the state through the provision of several mechanisms and legal rights (Wills²).

Key trends & dynamics in community engagement

From the point of view of institutions, like universities, community engagement means the participation in joint activity by members of the public for common goals. Participation is defined as being (Brodie et al, 2011- Involve report):

- **Voluntary-** participation is done on a voluntary basis, rather than contractually. People get involved because they want to.

¹ Chwalisz, C. 2015, *The Populist Signal: Why Politics and Democracy Need to Change*, Rowman and Littlefield International Ltd, London.

² Wills, J. 2016, *Locating Localism: Statecraft, citizenship and democracy*, Policy Press, Bristol.

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- **About Action**- participation is about action and doing things.
 - **Collective**- participation means being part of something bigger than yourself. It is a public exercise.
 - **Purposeful**- people get involved for a reason. Action is aligned to their interests and it is intended to have consequences.

Community engagement covers a range of practices and processes whereby people come together to pursue common goals and act for public, rather than individual, benefit. It incorporates citizens working with institutions to identify concerns, set priorities, make decisions, and organise action.

Community engagement is most developed within the community development profession, which seeks to facilitate citizen-led improvements in the social, cultural, economic, and environmental wellbeing of particular places. Community development necessarily takes a neighbourhood approach, with practitioners seeking to build the capacity of residents (often from disadvantaged communities) to take local action to improve public life.

As a profession, community development came to prominence in the UK during the late 1960s and early 1970s associated with Government-led anti-deprivation programmes. Its scope of approaches to engaging communities in shaping their local areas, influencing decision-making and building capacity for civic action has developed over time. Contemporary community development practice can be categorised into three broad approaches, each modelling a different emphasis to community engagement in civic life: Asset-Based Community Development, Community Organising, and Citizen Collaboration.

Asset-Based Community Development

Asset-based community development (ABCD) seeks to engage ordinary citizens in civic activity by building on the strengths that already exist in communities, rather than trying to plug the gaps or fill deficits. ABCD starts with what's strong, rather than what's wrong, and attempts to build relationships, connections and capacity so that ordinary people can address common concerns by applying their skills, passions, expertise and ideas. ABCD is rooted in building trust, mutual understanding, and confidence within communities, and as such can only occur over the long-term.

The Big Local programme is the latest large-scale ABCD initiative in the UK in which 150 neighbourhoods in England have been awarded £1million from the National Lottery

Community Fund to spend over a 10-year period on priorities and activity decided by local residents. Big Local aims to enable people to achieve lasting change in the areas where they live. It does this by giving local residents increased control over a long-term investment, with minimal requirements placed upon how they spend money and organise themselves. The programme seeks to model best practice in community engagement based on learning from past experiments, like the New Deal for Communities, by providing a long-term commitment to build community capacity; reducing red-tape and requirements of funding to encourage risk-taking and innovation; building on existing assets; and providing light-touch support from those with relevant expertise as and when communities need it, as opposed to encouraging expert-led decision-making. The project has sparked a range of initiatives in deprived communities across England, all driven by partnerships of local residents that meet regularly to prioritise, plan and organise action³.

Community Organising

Community organising differs from ABCD in its greater emphasis on building independent community power & voice, separate to public funding. The approach explicitly seeks to build grassroots influence and local leadership, developing broad-based alliances of civil society organisations that act as a form of ‘trade union for the community’ able to lobby decision-makers in the public and private sphere for their interests⁴. Community organising seeks to put ‘people before programme’ investing in relationship building and communication between diverse groups citizens from different walks of life and of different political persuasions, to identify common issues and develop shared agendas for change. Broad-based community organising situates itself as citizen-led politics (with a small ‘p’) that transcends party politics and partisan or ideological differences.

Community organising in the UK and is most closely associated with Citizens UK, a national broad-based community organising body that brings together the civic institutions in towns and cities, such as schools, churches, mosques, universities, and community organisations to create an umbrella membership organisation that facilitates collective action on common issues. Citizens UK alliances are member-led and funded and exist to build the collective power of members to influence decision-making, lobby for change and coordinate civic activity.

³ Institute for Voluntary Action Research. 2013, ‘Big Local: What’s new and different?’, Institute for Voluntary Action Research.

⁴ Wills, J. 2012, ‘The Geography of Community and Political Organisation in London today’, *Political Geography*, 33, 2, pp. 114-126.

Citizen Collaboration

A third approach to community engagement in civic action centres around more fluid and informal mechanisms through which people can share ideas, make connections, and develop collaborations with others. These approaches tend to be focussed on specific issues or challenges, such as the Citizens Assemblies that have been organised around climate change, or place-based approaches that seek to facilitate local activity through the provision of spaces for people to meet, plan and organise, such as Participatory City in Barking, London. These approaches tend to be less driven by established institutions or funders (but may be supported by them financially) and less structured than traditional community organising. They are best described as networks of citizens, large and small, that enable collective action around specific themes for limited periods of time.

Community Engagement in Universities

We see effective community engagement at universities as something that is different to public engagement. Public engagement refers to ways in which universities engage members of the public in their research findings or as participants in research. These engagements are university-led and play an important role in making academic outputs more relevant and impactful. In contrast, community engagement involves universities inviting communities to work together as partners in setting priorities, making decisions, and organising civic activity. Community engagement at universities varies in form across institutions and reflects the different approaches already outlined. Effective engagement can occur within different domains of activity including⁵:

- **Teaching and learning**- study programmes developed with communities to address societal needs; students involved in community-based learning; the inclusion of community groups in the planning and delivery of teaching.
- **Research**- research into the societal needs of external communities; participatory research implemented in partnership with community groups.
- **Service and knowledge exchange** - staff & students sharing expertise, skills, and time to support community initiatives and build the capacity-building amongst local groups, businesses and individuals.

⁵ Ćulum, B. 2018,. Literature Review: Dimensions and current practices of community engagement. In: Benneworth et al., *Mapping and Critical Synthesis of Current State-of-the-Art on Community Engagement in Higher Education*, Institute for the Development of Education, Zagreb

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- **Student initiatives** -the involvement of student organisations/initiatives in community engagement; support for student initiatives for community engagement by university.
 - **University-level engagement**- openness and accessibility of university facilities/services and knowledge resources; formal, strategic partnerships with community groups.

Activities within these areas tend to vary by their focus on *social justice*- working with marginalised groups to address social disadvantage; *economic development*-contributing to economic growth via innovation, entrepreneurship, and business engagement; and *community development*- contributing to the public good of a particular place, combining elements of social justice, economic development and public service⁶.

Why do we need Effective Community Engagement in Universities today?

The UK is navigating turbulent times: a fractured political landscape, shifting international relations, facing up to the global challenges of climate change, and adapting to a new reality where the pace of technological development is radically altering how we live and work. At the eye of this maelstrom are people and communities – responding, with varying degrees of success, to the uncertainty and pressing need for change which surround them. And increasingly, policy makers, funders and innovators are looking to communities as the crucible for transformation – where the insights and capacity to drive change reside.

Distrust in expertise and of decision-making by a remote, disconnected and out-of-touch professional class is nothing new, but has intensified amongst society in recent decades. The Covid-19 pandemic has amplified some of these concerns, putting the role of expert knowledge under further scrutiny as well as highlighting the active role that communities can and are willing to play in addressing pressing social challenges.

Universities sit in a unique position of influence in UK society. They are the places where academic expertise is generated and where the experts and decision-makers of the future are educated. As large institutions they necessarily have an impact on the communities they are located in, shaping local social, economic and cultural change. Historically, however, communities have often been too removed from the research and teaching activities within universities, which influence the policies and investments that shape people's lives. This is

⁶ Hazelkorn, E. 2016, 'Contemporary debates part I: theorising civic engagement', In: Goddard, J., Hazelkorn, E., Kempton, L & Vallance, P. (Eds.), *The Civic University: The Policy and Leadership Challenges*, pp. 34–64. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham.

especially true for those areas where there has been a traditional assumption around the need for specialist knowledge or training. We believe that one of the root causes of entrenched social challenges in the UK is the disconnect between the knowledge and experience which resides in communities, and those who hold the resources and levers of power which affect them.

We believe that involvement of communities in university activities and vice versa can lead to better decision making on the issues that most affect them. In turn, communities can benefit from access to knowledge, resources and skills contained within universities to support resident-led civic action.

Timeline Diagram – when to use this in your CUA process & what themes does it link to in the Civic Recipe?

This toolkit will be most helpful when thinking through ideas with community partners about the focus and structure of long-term community engagement. It should be used to help think through how communities can be involved in strategy, decision-making and collaboration in civic activity, rather than as informants for more traditional consultation or recipients of services or offers from the university. The principles and case studies outlined in this toolkit link to the following ingredients in the '[Civic Recipe](#)':

Civic behaviours – maximising the civic contribution of the HEI	
Internal facing policies <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volunteering	External-facing 'Anchoring' activity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community policies• Estates• Social Responsibility
Civic knowledge building – aligning research and teaching with local priorities	
Education and skills <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Widening Participation• Skills• Engaged Learning / Employability	Research, Innovation and KE <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research challenges• Knowledge exchange

Principles for Effective Community Engagement

We believe that effective community engagement:

1. **Takes an asset-based approach** that builds on the strengths and assets of communities, rather than focussing on deficits;
2. **Is based on a long-term commitment** to build relationships, trust and mutual understanding to lay the basis for effective communication and collaboration;
3. **Values communities as experts by experience.** People know best about their place and the lives of those who live there. Communities are treated as equal partners by institutions, with valid insight, expertise and knowledge that can be complimented with relevant expertise from professionals;
4. **Puts people before programme** by investing time and resources in building relationships with people through which shared interests and activities identified, rather than seeking to bring communities into a pre-existing agenda;
5. **Builds the capacity of communities** to articulate their voice, pursue their agenda and influence change, independent of large institutions;
6. **Is a social process** and should provide opportunities for new connections, ideas, and collaborations to emerge organically and ad hoc, recognising the importance of face-to-face interaction, serendipity and fun.

The following examples show these principles in practice, providing case studies in effective and innovative approaches to community engagement drawn from civil society and the higher education sector.

Taking an Asset-Based Approach, Ambition Lawrence Weston

Place profile: Lawrence Weston is an estate on the outskirts of Bristol. Home to around 7000 people, the population is predominately white British and characterised by high levels of unemployment and economic deprivation. The community was awarded £1 million over 10 years as part of the national Big Local programme, which has catalysed several resident-led community development initiatives.

What: [Ambition Lawrence Weston](#) (ALW) is a resident-led development trust located on the Lawrence Weston estate on the outskirts of Bristol. The trust takes an asset-based approach to community development, building on the strengths of local people, organisations and spaces to bring benefits to a deprived community. The trust identifies local priorities and works to build partnerships between residents, local stakeholders (including Bristol City Council) and experts to develop initiatives.

Who: Residents working in partnership with stakeholders including the local authority, property developers, and community organisations.

Why: Lawrence Weston was chosen as a Big Local area and given £1 million of lottery money over 10 years, to invest in residents' priorities. The trust was formed to deliver the community's plan and secure a lasting legacy from the Big Local fund. Ambition Lawrence Weston is directed by a resident-led steering group to ensure it is genuinely resident-driven and trusted locally.

What Happened: The trust has developed several initiatives that have brought, or are expected to bring, significant benefits to the local community, including:

- Lobbying Bristol City Council on the importance of including an affordable supermarket as part of the area's regeneration plans. ALW successfully secured the building of a new supermarket in the area on land that had been earmarked for housing. They worked to attract a Lidl to the area to provide accessible, affordable food to residents.
- ALW are building a wind turbine to provide enough energy to power 3500 homes a year. The turbine will be owned by the trust for the benefit of the community, providing affordable, renewal energy to residents and providing a source of income for the community.

How does this Apply to Universities: The example of Lawrence, as well as other Big Local areas, shows the value of putting residents in the driving seat of decision-making about their area. It highlights how investing in the community development staff to build trust and relationships in a community can enable people to take ownership of change and develop innovative and effective ideas for improvements. ALW have been able to leverage the investment in staff to secure external funding to support these schemes.

Focus: Place based community-led development

Who was involved: Residents of Lawrence Weston estate; Lottery funding via the Big Local programme.

Partnership Model: Community development budget, under community control. Community Development Trust.

What Happened Next: The resident-led community development trust is leveraging in funding from external sources to support innovative initiatives designed to provide benefits to residents, including a community-owned wind turbine, provision of community facilities and enrichment projects.

Committing to the Long-Term, Cardiff University Community Gateway

Place Profile: Grangetown is a traditionally working-class suburb of Cardiff, home to around 20,000 people, the area has been experiencing recent population change with wealthier, middle class people moving to the area. The area has a diverse population, with large south-Asian and Somali communities.

What: [Community Gateway](#) is a long-term strategic partnership between Cardiff University and the neighbourhood of Grangetown. As outlined on their website: “Community Gateway is committed to building a long-term partnership with residents of Grangetown to make the area an even better place to live. We will do this by developing world class research, teaching, and volunteering opportunities which respond to local needs.” Community Gateway involves local residents in strategy and decision-making about its activities through a number of mechanisms, including:

- A **steering group** of representatives from the university and the local community to oversee activities, set direction and make decisions.
- An annual **partnership planning process**, ‘Love Grangetown’, which involves residents, university staff and students in identifying issues and setting priorities for action. This involves gathering ideas and information through peer research, and other consultation methods.

Who: Community Gateway brokers relationships and collaborations between university staff & students, and Grangetown residents develop projects that benefit the whole place. The approach is based on the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships between the university and community partners, for the long term. Community Gateway engages in projects that combine the skills and interests of those in the community with those in the university

Why: The strategic partnership was set up by Cardiff University to see whether university skills, resources and expertise could offer something to the local community and whether community expertise, skills and resources could offer something to the university. Grangetown was chosen by the university as it is local to the university and was seen as offering opportunities to explore a range of issues and topics.

What Happened: Community Gateway supports various projects created in collaboration between Grangetown residents, and university staff and students. Projects are given seed-funding from a community engagement budget, which is administered by the steering group. Community Gateway plays a community development role in Grangetown, catalysing and

leading activities to benefit the community. Most notably they have successfully brought a former cricket pavilion under community ownership and secured Lottery funding to transform it into a new community hub. The partnership also seeks to build the capacity of the community to address issues and contribute to civic life through a community leadership training programme that offers residents the opportunity to build their skills and connections to take local action.

Focus: Place based- neighbourhood level

Who was involved: Cardiff University; Residents and Community Organisations of the Grangetown area.

Partnership Model: Long-term community-university partnership.

What Happened Next: The partnership continues to support the development of new community projects and civic initiatives delivered through collaboration between university people and residents, including the creation of a new community-owned hub.

Valuing Communities as Experts by Experience- Citizens Assemblies & Participatory Budgeting

Citizens Assemblies & Juries

A citizens' assembly or jury is a group of people who are brought together to discuss an issue or issues and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are chosen so they reflect the wider population- in terms of demographics. Citizens' assemblies give members of the public the time and opportunity to learn about and discuss a topic, before reaching conclusions. Assembly Members are asked to make trade-offs and arrive at workable recommendations.

Assemblies are often convened by large institutions such as local authorities, who provide funding and contract in specialist organisations to facilitate the process. Assemblies involve at least 40 members of the public, whilst juries involve around 20-30 people, and can take place over weeks and months as members meet regularly to discuss issues and assess supporting evidence.

The Leeds Climate Change Citizens Jury

Place Profile: Leeds is a major urban centre, home to around 800,000 people. The population is predominantly white British, with a significant number of residents from ethnic minority backgrounds, and the city faces challenges around inner city deprivation. There is a diverse and active community and voluntary sector in the city.

What: A citizens' jury was convened to examine Leeds City Council's response to the emergency of climate change and develop recommendations to guide the future work of the [Leeds Climate Commission](#). The jury was made up of 25 residents of the city, chosen to provide a representative sample of the local population, although those chosen had to apply to be involved. The citizens' jury ran for a total of 30 hours over nine sessions. An oversight panel was set up to ensure the process was unbiased and fair. The panel made decisions about the recruitment process and the jury profile; it also selected expert commentators- 22 in total - who gave presentations to the jury and answered questions from them. Jurors were asked to consider the question: "What should Leeds do about the emergency of climate change?" They produced a list of 12 recommendations, covering transport, housing, communications, finance, green spaces, aviation, a proposal for a Leeds Green New Deal, plastics, recycling, and political co-operation.

Who: The Leeds Climate Change Citizens' Jury was put together by Leeds Climate Commission, an independent organisation established in 2017 to help Leeds to make a positive choice on issues relating to energy, carbon, weather and climate. It brings together key organisations and actors from across the city and from the public, private and third sectors. Facilitated by Shared Future CIC, the jury was made up of members of the public, and considered evidence from relevant experts, including professionals from the University of Leeds. The oversight panel consisted of 22 representatives from stakeholder organisations, including Extinction Rebellion, Friends of the Earth, Leeds Chamber of Commerce, Leeds City Council, Racial Justice Network, University of Leeds, Yorkshire Water and Youth Strike for Climate.

Why: The jury was set up to help move forward the local conversation on climate change and how to respond to it. The Leeds Climate Commission recognised the need for transformative change in the city to meet the challenges of climate change. The jury was designed to help secure permission for this change from local citizens, by allowing those not usually heard from in climate debates to scrutinise evidence and proposals for change.

What Happened: The findings, in the form of recommendations written by the jurors, were presented at a public launch event in November 2019. The jurors' recommendations were also formally presented to Leeds City Council's Climate Emergency Advisory Committee in January 2020, feeding into formal recommendations to Leeds City Council's executive board.

How does this relate to universities: The approach taken to involving community members in deliberating about specific challenges and creating recommendations to address them could be replicated as part of the process of creating a Civic University Agreement. Citizens could form a jury around a particular local challenge that the university is interested in helping to address. Or a jury could be set up to deliberate about how the university and community can work more closely in partnership to address a range of issues.

Focus: Challenge based- climate change

Who was involved: Leeds City Council, Leeds University, 22 expert commentators; 25 Leeds residents; Local Business Association; Local Community Networks & Activist Groups.

Partnership Model: Citizen Jury/Assembly

What Happened Next: Recommendations made by the jury informed Leeds City Council's Climate Change Emergency Strategy, shaping council policy.

Participatory Budgeting

Participatory budgeting (PB) involves the delegation of influence over local budget and spending decisions to citizens, using a variety of methods. Developed in Latin America, participatory budgeting has increasingly been employed by authorities in Europe to involve communities in budgetary decisions at the local level. Budgets are often related to particular themes, rather than covering entire public spending realms, and participation usually involves a combination of public meetings for citizens to deliberate over decisions and cast votes, and digital tools that allow for mass polling. PB can happen at one-off events or last longer periods to encourage greater engagement.

Fife Council

Place Profile: Fife is a coastal local authority area in Scotland, with a population of around 370,000, predominantly white Scottish or British. The area is largely rural with many villages, small towns and 3 larger towns. Fife performs just above average on economic deprivation scores for Scotland.

What: The Scottish Government is supporting local authorities to develop PB approaches in their areas. It is using the free, open-source software, Consul to do this. Consul includes a platform that allows any citizen to create a proposal for spend; for others to prioritise and vote of proposals before they are checked for viability; and final voting and budget allocation on the most popular proposals. [Fife Council](#) have begun a PB process using Consul to allocate their £22million transport budget. The process is currently on hold due to Covid at the time of writing, but it aims to engage citizens in making decisions about how the council can provide public transport at a reduced cost to the taxpayer.

Who: Fife Council and Fife residents.

Why: To involve citizens in shaping future transport policy by providing new ideas and perspectives on what could work. This is intended to create a more effective service at reduced cost to the tax-payer.

What Happened: At the time of writing, the work is on pause due to Covid-19. Prior to pausing, the process involved face-to-face community engagement to identify what was working within the public transport system; imagine how things could be different; and co-design options for

new service provision with community members in small ‘mini publics’ or citizen juries. The intention is for these options to go to public vote via the digital platform when the process is restarted. Fife council wants to introduce PB processes across more of its budgets in future.

How does this relate to universities: What scope is there for university budgets to open up to participatory budgeting by members of the local community? Could community engagement budgets be shaped by the local community? Could research budgets incorporate an element of PB to give communities more influence over the direction and use of research? Equally, what role can universities play in supporting processes of PB in their areas? Could university staff, students and community members collectively develop ideas for new services provided by local authorities?

Focus: Democratising decision-making on public budgets

Who was involved: Fife Council

Partnership Model: Participatory budgeting.

What Happened Next: The participatory budgeting process is on hold due to Covid but there are plans to learn from the model with the intention of extending it to other areas of the council’s budget.

Putting People Before Programme, Non-Party Politics at the Local Level

Community engagement is about involving all those with an interest and the will to contribute to local civic life. At the local authority level, civic engagement is dominated by party politics, which can alienate and exclude masses of ordinary people from getting involved. As society becomes more politically polarised there is a need for ways to engage people in civic life that put party politics and pre-existing agendas aside, and instead encourage the participation of all and anyone who wants to make a difference.

Recent developments in non-party politics have sprung up across the UK, enabled in part by rights contained in the Localism Act (2011), which have afforded communities greater opportunities to influence local decision-making to better reflect the desires and sentiment of local people, rather than party agendas. These include the ‘general power of competence, which enables town and parish councils the power to do whatever local people think fit – provided that this does not clash with other laws. This allows local councils to expand their remit and have greater influence over local matters than before. The Community Right to Challenge, enables local groups to put their ideas about how they could run services differently from and better than the Local Authority, and trigger a tendering exercise so that they have the chance to compete to put their ideas into practice. These powers have promoted groups of citizens to reinvigorate local decision-making structures, such as town and parish councils, in non-partisan ways.

Be Buckfastleigh Participatory Town Council

Place Profile: Buckfastleigh is a small market town in rural Devon, home to around 3,300 people, mainly of white British ethnicity. Child poverty is higher than average, and the area faces challenge associated with rural economic decline. There is an active community and voluntary sector in the area, developing projects to respond to local needs.

What: In 2015 9 local residents stood for and won 9 of 12 seats on a dormant Town Council as part of the newly formed [Buckfastleigh Independent Group \(BIG\)](#). This group formed from networks built through a community project known as [Be Buckfastleigh](#). The town councillors are non-partisan and have sought to open up the council’s decision-making and spending processes to greater involvement from all residents.

Who: Buckfastleigh residents and community organisations.

Why: A group of active residents were frustrated at decisions being made at the District Local Authority level (Teignbridge Council). They thought that decisions were being made that were to the detriment of the Buckfastleigh community, which felt like a forgotten town. The residents sought to transform their dormant Town Council to reinvigorate local democracy and provide alternative solutions to their problems.

What Happened: Since being elected, BIG increased the local council tax precept (the small share of council tax that goes to town and parish councils), so people in the highest council-tax band paid nearly £2 a week, to boost the budget for local spending. Through this, they have developed a range of local services based on the ideas and actions of other residents, including a new Citizens Advice bureau on Friday mornings, floodlights for the football pitch, a new “town ranger” to take care of outdoor public spaces, and a school-holiday activity service for local young people called Hello Summer. These new services are delivered in partnership with local community organisations and volunteers.

Changes were made to the way the town council operates. It’s meetings and activities are now publicised on Facebook and any resident (not just elected councillors) are free to join in at monthly council meetings and shape decision-making. BIG have plans to expand the town council’s responsibilities into the provision of local youth services and buses and develop alternative models of provision to those of the district council.

How does this apply to universities: Universities could work with local citizens to reinvigorate town and parish councils in similar ways. Staff and students have knowledge, time, and skills to offer as part of this. Looking inwardly, universities also have a variety of decision-making structures, including councils and committees. Local residents could be invited to sit in these structures to represent the voices and interests of communities and help shape university activities to provide more local benefits.

Focus: Place based- town council

Who was involved: Buckfastleigh Town Council; Local Residents; Community Organisations.

Partnership Model: Town/Parish Council

What Happened Next: Plans to develop a network of local leaders around the Town Council, take on and re-design the provision of local services from the District Council, and connect and share resources with similar local councils in the surrounding areas.

Building Civic Capacity, Kings College London and Citizens UK

Several universities have in the UK have been exploring the role that taking a community organising approach can bring to their engagement with local communities. This approach is based on building alliances between the university and local civic & community organisations, such as schools, colleges, churches, etc, to collectively identify common issues and take action to address these through lobbying business and public sector actors for change. Community organising prioritises the building of influence and power of civil society organisations and individual citizens, and as such universities play a role in helping build the capacity of the community to advance its interests and develop the leadership and organising skills of resident, students, and staff.

KCL and Citizens UK

Place Profile: Kings College has campuses in the London boroughs of Lambeth, Southwark and Westminster. These inner-city areas are home to diverse communities spanning income, ethnicity and cultural background. They are characterised by persistent challenges in inner city London, such as economic deprivation and the fast pace of population turnover and social change.

What: [Kings College London](#) have incorporated a community organising approach into their community engagement activities through a strategic partnership with [Citizens UK](#). Citizens UK is empowering staff, students and community members to work together to build their collective power and act for the common good. They do this by teaching community organising techniques so that people can have an impact on the issues that matter to them.

Who: Kings College London in partnership with Citizens UK; local residents.

Why: The partnership developed to enable Kings to play an enabling role in the community, supporting staff, students, and residents to build their capacity to take action of shared issues. The partnership aims to develop people's leadership skills so they can better shape their communities.

What Happened: In bringing a community organising approach into the university's engagement with communities, the partnership has spawned a number of projects, including:

- **Parent Power**- a parental engagement project run by King's Widening Participation Department in partnership with Citizens UK. The project recruits and trains parents from King's local boroughs to become experts in university access and campaigners on educational equality within their communities. Since the project began in July 2017, it has engaged over 200 underrepresented parents, recruiting 35 as local parent power leaders. The parents have led a series of successful campaigns, most notably securing fully funded bespoke open days at universities across the UK and winning bursary places at private summer schools for the second year running.
- **Migration, Social Justice and Community Organising - a service-learning module.** This module combines class-based learning with societal impact as students develop and run a community organising campaign with Citizens UK. It forms part of KCL's commitment to developing practical and innovative responses by drawing on, and developing, the combined skills and experiences of King's staff and students.

Focus: Building capacity and power.

Who was involved: KCL, Citizens UK.

Partnership Model: Embedding Community Organising within the University's engagement with communities.

What Happened Next: Joint campaigning by students, staff, and residents on key local issues, and building local leadership skills.

Building Social Infrastructure, Citizen Collaboration Spaces

Spaces for people from all walks of life to come together, connect and share ideas are vital in supporting greater citizen engagement in civic life, problem-solving and community development. In recent years, a number of these spaces have been developed in different parts of the UK. Such spaces help build the social infrastructure that makes collaboration possible by offering a mix of informal meeting space for connections to develop organically over time and more intentional events, processes, and opportunities for people to collectively develop ideas and action. The Every One Every Day initiative and Imperial College Invention Rooms illustrate these spaces in civil society and university settings.

Participatory City Foundation: Every One Every Day

Place Profile: Barking & Dagenham is an urban borough of London. It has a population of around 210,000 and is characterised by ethnic diversity, pockets of economic deprivation, and a high degree of population change. Traditionally a working-class area, wealthier people are moving to area attracted by several large-scale regeneration schemes. Barking and Dagenham council are explicitly trying to strengthen and build the capacity of the local community and voluntary sector to meet the challenges the area faces.

What: Every One Every Day is a venture, launched by Barking & Dagenham council in partnership with the [Participatory City Foundation](#) to create more than 250 neighbourhood projects and 100 businesses over a 5-year period. The initiative incorporates 4 high street shop units and a large warehouse space situated across the borough. These spaces act as shopfronts for community engagement, staffed by community development workers whose job it is to connect people with similar interests, passions, and skills to spawn local civic activity. Regular events like community dinners, ‘trade schools’ where residents swap skills, and planning workshops, are held to bring people together to share ideas and plan action. The initiative has developed a network of over 5000 residents, who volunteer their time to develop activities for community benefit. The programme seeks to catalyse local civic action by allowing connections and ideas to grow overtime. Project impacts are monitored by in-house researchers who identify best practice and gather evidence of the benefits brought by different initiatives.

Who: Participatory City Foundation, Barking & Dagenham Council, Residents of Barking & Dagenham.

Why: The programme came about from concerns around cuts to the local authority budget, meaning the council had less money to run services and address local issues; and a belief in the ability of ordinary people to create innovative ideas, activities and collaborations that could have real community benefit. The idea behind the initiative is to enable civic action by providing the social infrastructure and support to enable communication between citizens. The council provided £1.5million over 5 years, which helped attract an additional £6million from other sources, including the Big Lottery Fund and Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

What Happened: The programme has supported the development of hundreds of community-led projects ranging from social groups and events to business start-ups. The scheme contributes towards building the civic capacity the community and puts them in the driving seat of local development and change.

Focus: Building connections within a community to develop idea, activities and collaboration

Who was involved: Barking & Dagenham Council, Participatory City Foundation, Barking residents.

Partnership Model: Growing networks of active citizens.

What Happened Next: The initiative continues to grow its network of local citizens, seeding new ideas and activities. A new business incubation space has been established to support local businesses across the borough.

Citizen Collaboration Spaces in Universities- Imperial College London: The Invention Rooms

Place Profile: Imperial College's Invention Rooms are located at their campus in White City, north London, an inner-city area, characterised by high levels of ethnic and national diversity as well as economic deprivation. The area is undergoing large-scale regeneration with several significant developments in the area, contributing to social and economic change.

What: [The Invention Rooms](#) is a dedicated community engagement space located at Imperial College London's campus in White City. Its purpose is to help Imperial College staff and students interact with communities outside the university. The Invention Rooms provides space, equipment, and access to expertise for university staff, students and local people to develop ideas and learn new skills. It consists of a community café; the hackspace, where people can access digital equipment and expertise to develop ideas; and the makerspace, a workshop and design studio where people can use tools and equipment to bring ideas and designs to life with support from on-hand technicians. The Invention Rooms is run by Imperial's community engagement team who run a programme of regular events and workshops designed to engage and upskill local residents and community organisations.

Who: Imperial College London, local residents, schools.

Why: The space was opened in recognition of the untapped creativity and inventiveness of the local community, and the benefits that access to university resources, skills and expertise could afford to the community. The space is designed to blur the boundaries between community and university and allow connections to grow gradually through practical experiences of sharing, doing and making.

What Happened: The space hosts several programmes to build skills, knowledge and capacity in the community, including:

- The Maker Challenge: an after-school programme that allows groups of young people to develop their ideas into working prototypes with the help of student mentors, and teaches them new skills in coding, 3D printing and business development.
- What the Tech?: regular drop-in sessions that allow residents to ask for help with phones, laptops and getting online from student volunteers.
- [Agents of Change](#): a women's leadership programme designed to remove barriers that prevent local women from achieving their potential, equipping them to empower

themselves and their communities. The programme aims to build a place-based network of female leaders in the north of Hammersmith & Fulham borough.

Other sessions for all ages include coding, maths clubs and drone-making workshops. The space is also available for use by community organisations to hold workshops and events.

Focus: Providing community members with access to expertise, equipment, and training to develop ideas

Who was involved: Imperial College London.

Partnership Model: 'Shop-front' & collaboration space that provides the community with access to university resources and expertise.

What Happened Next: Range of programmes that support community-university collaborations on product development and community leadership.

Next Steps: Signposting to Useful Organisations & Resources

The following organisations and resources might be helpful for exploring the ideas and case studies covered in this toolkit and accessing further support.

Big Local

Local Trust: <https://localtrust.org.uk/big-local/>

Community Business

Power to Change: <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/>

Community Engagement Practitioners

Institute for Community Studies: <https://icstudies.org.uk/>

Involve: <https://www.involve.org.uk/>

The Young Foundation: <https://www.youngfoundation.org/>

Community Organising

Citizens UK: <https://www.citizensuk.org/>

Locality: <https://locality.org.uk/>

Community Organisers: <https://www.organisers.org.uk/>

Funding for Community Engagement

The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation: <https://esmeefairbairn.org.uk/>

National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>

National Lottery Community Fund: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/>



Civic University
Network



**Institute for
Community Studies**

Dr Liam Harney

Institute for Community Studies

Emily Morrison

Institute of Community Studies