



# One Community Forum Toolkit

**The Forum for Bridging Gaps Between Students,  
Universities and the Community**

## Get in touch

If you have any questions, please contact:

Fiona Walsh, Partnerships and Development Director at Student Hubs  
at [fiona.walsh@studenthubs.org](mailto:fiona.walsh@studenthubs.org)

Richard Brabner at [richard.brabner@upp-ltd.com](mailto:richard.brabner@upp-ltd.com)



# Table of Contents

<b>1. Foreword</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>2. One Community Forum Model</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>3. Who this Toolkit is for and how to use it</b>	<b>07</b>
<b>4. Our History Delivering One Community Forums</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>5. Overall Impact and Benefits</b>	<b>09</b>
<b>6. Developing and Delivering the One Community Forum</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7. After the Forum</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>8. Developing Forum Activities</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>9. Key Takeaways</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>10. Appendix – Example Case for Support for Universities</b>	<b>28</b>

# 1. Foreword



There has been a rallying cry in the sector for the past three to five years about the need to co-produce with students and for universities to more directly meet the civic needs of our university towns and cities. These two areas don't typically overlap, with co-production for students focused often on the curriculum and the civic agenda for universities trying (and often struggling) to deeply involve students as active participants.

As Student Hubs and the UPP Foundation release the One Community Forum toolkit, a resource we hope will be incredibly valuable to institutions challenging their own practices and attitudes to co-production and civic engagement, the time is right to question how far universities are going in meeting the needs of students and communities.

Student Hubs' work is reliant on communities as well as students benefiting through our social action activities which we deliver in partnership with universities, and through our experience we know that the reputation of the university in the town or city they are located in can be an immediate barrier to meaningful dialogue and engagement with community groups and organisations. Universities do lots of targeted work to bring large businesses to campus to engage students, but small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and local community organisations are often left out or have bigger challenges in seeking university support. Staff or volunteers supporting these types of local organisations are more likely to live in the towns and cities which their university is located in, and may have negative preconceptions about students, the support their university can provide, or the value of higher education itself, as the UPP Foundation's polling revealed.

Creating opportunities to rebuild the trust between students, universities and community groups is incredibly valuable and is becoming increasingly important as universities are called upon to diversify their partnerships and activities by the Office for Students and other practitioners. In [Student Hubs' 2021-22 impact data](#), 77% of our community partners agreed or strongly agreed that working with the Hub has positively changed their perception of university students, showing the immense value of these place-based activities as a stepping stone to fostering deeper relationships in the community. To get community groups and SMEs to participate in university activities in the first place, long-term and sustained efforts need to be made by university staff to create trusting relationships, to listen to the problems these organisations and groups genuinely face, and build interventions which directly support their needs.

The One Community Forum is a starting point for establishing and developing the deep relationships needed in our communities to truly tackle social change.

The same tenet applies to community activities which aim to involve students. A report from the Office for Students released in [February 2022 from SQW](#) noted that key challenges from the 20 institutions involved in knowledge exchange activities included partnership engagement and

relationships; maintaining students' engagement with KE activities; and delivering student-focused KE activities specifically. Students need to be involved as equal partners in discussing the creation of initiatives to serve them, just as the community deserves a place. Students will provide insights into the barriers they face, the social issues they are invested in tackling, their own preconceptions towards voluntary and paid university activities, as well as the sense of ownership they may develop in being part of the planning of this work.

But co-production shouldn't stop at talking about programme or activity design. If we are to build students (and future graduates) into real changemakers and leaders, it is up to us to equip them properly. These community initiatives need to be designed with student accessibility, training, support, and empowering development in mind too. Otherwise how can we expect students to be the solution to tackling local social issues when we have provided no tools to help them imagine the depths of the problems at hand or understand the upper limits of their own abilities and power?

The UPP Foundation's work seeks to further universities' commitment to delivering public good, and it is this shared commitment which has seen the partnership between the UPP Foundation and Student Hubs thrive for the past six years. It is not enough for universities to decide what it means to be good to their communities, communities need to be able to share the same space and have conversations with their universities where they can set the direction of transformation based on legitimate social issues and challenges which impact that community. This is what it means for a university to be an anchor institution: to listen, to understand, and to use their tools and resources to address what they have heard.

We hope the One Community Forum toolkit will provide the basis for exciting and challenging discussions, reflections and tangible action for practice at your university to build a space which dismantles the hierarchy and privilege between universities, students and communities, and makes way for honest communication. The value of the Forum is not in the event, but in all the work and conversations which come after this point, and this requires dedicated time, effort, and staff capacity. It is only once this genuine commitment with resources is made that the real work can begin.

**Simran Dhanjal-Field, CEO of Student Hubs, Fiona Walsh, Partnerships and Development Director at Student Hubs, and Richard Brabner, Director of the UPP Foundation**

## 2. One Community Forum Model

**Listening exercises are more important than ever for understanding the needs of students and the local community, and the One Community Forum format enables engaging discussion, debate and action planning on key social action issues.**

The One Community Forum is an event which brings together students, local community organisations and partners, and university staff to discuss key social issues of the local community. The event is typically delivered as an in-person event for up to three hours, led by a Chair to deliver the content and facilitate activities. Following a forum, and in collaboration with students and community organisations, initiatives, activities and programmes are launched prompting student engagement with and capacity for the challenges and issues identified at the Forum. In the longer term, the outcomes of forums can support universities to direct their resources and strategy to tackling these local issues in a collaborative way.

One Community Forums enable communication, discussion and debate about key issues which are central to the co-production process. Creating a real place-based

difference isn't something that can happen in isolation: real change has to be informed by all stakeholders and that includes the local community. Meaningful co-production is also where the ownership for the activities is shared between the stakeholders and informed by lived experiences which are respected and given space at the table.

Student social action being embedded within this process is a necessary intervention for various reasons. Students have always cared deeply about the issues which impact them, and broadly come to university curious and open to learn. Social action is a means through which students can discover their communities and themselves, develop their skills, and see the tangible impact they can create perhaps for the first time. The higher education sector is beginning to understand how deeply students' connection to place matters in their belonging and retention at university, and by creating place-based interventions through activities like the One Community Forum, students get to be actors in community change rather than having change done to them.

# 3. Who this Toolkit is for and how to use it

This Toolkit has been designed to be used by university staff to support the coordination of their own One Community Forums. The Toolkit will help staff who are responsible for knowledge exchange, public and civic engagement, volunteering and student engagement strategies at their university.

The resource offers guidance in designing a One Community Forum; incorporating activities, top tips

and case studies to help individuals understand the actions, impact and activities required. The Toolkit supports staff to reflect and plan post-event, and to set their goals and roadmap to continue their work.

The appendix may be used to support university staff to produce their proposals to influence budget holders or senior leadership teams to resource the event.



# 4. Our History Delivering One Community Forums

Student Hubs is a social action charity which works in partnership with UK universities to deliver in-curricular and extracurricular activities. All of our activities are designed to be place-based, with university students, community organisations and participants benefitting as a result of our opportunities. We believe that students engaging with social and environmental issues offers a transformative experience for their skills and experiences, their peer network, their belonging and engagement with their local community, and for their ability to be active citizens for life. For communities, this approach provides free capacity from students which they may not otherwise receive and is targeted to meet their specific local needs, both of which are vital for high quality community impact.

Between 2017-2021, Student Hubs received funding to deliver One Community Forums with our Hub partner universities (our Hubs providing yearly social action activities with a 2-3 person staff team and a team of volunteer student leaders). Across these four years, Student Hubs delivered events at universities where

we already had strong community and student connections through our Hubs; this enabled us to test the effectiveness and impact of these.

The resulting projects and activities from the Forum have reached over 600 students and over 2000 young people and community members.

Events were held at:

- the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University in 2017
- the University of Southampton in 2018
- virtually across our Hub network (in partnership with the University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Kingston University, University of Southampton and University of Winchester) in 2020.

Following the end of our funding with the UPP Foundation and through testing this event in various locations and partnerships, we felt confident that we could deliver the event in partnership with a university as part of a short three-month project. We piloted this with Leeds Conservatoire in 2022, and we delivered a One Community Forum with University College Birmingham between May-September 2023.

# 5. Overall Impact and Benefits

There are numerous benefits to delivering a One Community Forum for the university, students and local organisations. These include:



## **Strengthening links to the community.**

By building a dialogue with community organisations, universities build stronger partnerships, students feel a greater sense of belonging to their university town or city, and the community feels more able to speak about the challenges and issues they face which the university can support with.



**Co-creating meaningful and impactful activities.** Enabling university stakeholders, community organisations and students to work together in the ideation, creation and delivery phases of activities enhances the potential meaning and impact. It will also allow practitioners to be more adaptable and resilient as they create and implement new activities as there will be a greater understanding of what students and communities need for these activities to thrive.

**“Enabling young people to make a positive impact in the world is core to our mission as a University. The One Community Forum offers a great platform to help align our social responsibility efforts with county-wide goals, share experiences with public, private and charitable organisations and work collaboratively towards increasing impact in the Oxfordshire youth sector.”**

Staff member from Oxford Brookes University from our 2017 One Community Forum

**Creating community advocates for local practice.** Involving community organisations directly in this work enables the university to unpack preconceptions or rebuild trust which may have been lost from prior partnerships or initiatives. This in turn supports universities to create community champions who are bought into the work, able to share their perspectives and introduce their networks, and provide case studies for future partnerships whilst benefiting their own organisations, service users or community participants.

**Developing students' skills and experiences.** Research from The Bridge Group in 2021 suggested that '51% of graduates in the UK remain local to their university after graduation'. It is vital that universities are preparing students with the skills necessary to be leaders and changemakers in their communities. If half of students are likely to stay in their university town or city upon graduating, having experience of participating in local activities will only strengthen their appetite for doing so and ability to do this effectively.

**Building an evidence base for future activities.** One Community Forums offer the chance for universities, students and communities to be involved in creative innovation, working together to tackle current social issues. It is an exciting testing ground for university practitioners to learn more about best practice

in engaging students, communities, and the value of making place-based change. The outputs and outcomes from the activities post-event are an exciting starting point for shaping more robust longer term plans for how universities lead this work, and support their communities and students to be an embedded part of this practice.

**"It was lovely to be involved in this type of solutions-focused and innovative discussion."**

Kingston University staff member from our 2020 Virtual One Community Forum

# Understanding your limiting factors

Whilst the One Community Forum can have great impact for all parties involved, there can be limiting factors depending on your local context, your staff support, your history of delivering these activities, your student body and more.

Below we have provided a reflection guide to proactively consider how you might address your institutions potential limitations.

## Trust and reputation with community organisations

It's useful to understand what the university's trust and reputation is like with organisations based in the community. We recommend that you have a conversation with potential One Community Forum attendees about their prior experience. We have occasionally found that a partner may have had a negative experience with another university project or partnership, which impacts their perceptions of new initiatives. The One Community Forum can be a brilliant opportunity to reshape this relationship, but it relies on strong partnership and relationship building, which in turn requires capacity and staff support. If your university hasn't been strong in this area or has capacity challenges, consider how to overcome these barriers or make your outputs and outcomes clearer i.e. this being a smaller part

of a larger scale project to rebuild trust in the community.

## Student engagement

Consider what student engagement looks like at your institution and the levels of trust students have for university initiatives. This may mean thinking about potential advocates you to bring on board to support this work, such as your Students' Union, your volunteering team, your student leaders and sabbatical or course reps. If your student body has challenges with engaging in extracurricular activities (e.g. perhaps you have a large commuter cohort, or students may need additional confidence building to participate) consult students directly to understand how accessible your opportunities are and what additional support students may need to enable them to engage fully.

## The depth of post-Forum activities

Whilst the Forum is a strong event, it's the actions and impact after the Forum which are the most powerful in terms of social and community change. If you are unable to spend the time, capacity or resources required to undertake the post-event activities or research, you may find your impact limited. When proposing this project to your institution, make sure to include the 6-12 month period after the Forum in which you would expect to be testing new initiatives, developing activities for the next academic year, or doing the research activities required to develop new projects or scale existing ones.

### Strategic direction

For the One Community Forum to be effective, its outputs and outcomes need to be embedded within the strategic direction of the university. The journey map in the next section supports you to reflect on how your institution plans might take this work forward, where it sits and with whom, and how the strategy and activities will be reviewed and adapted.

Without this strategic focus, it is likely that delivering a One Community Forum as a one-off event will be low impact and less effective in serving community and student needs.

**“[There was] a lot of engagement from all parties involved at our table, there was lots of different points of views put forward that perhaps you don’t always consider. Everyone was very receptive and positive towards new ideas . . . Very good event, myself and Gareth enjoyed ourselves, we both felt like we were given a fair platform to contribute and felt listened too.”**

St George’s Crypt staff member from our 2022 One Community Forum

# 6. Developing and Delivering the One Community Forum

Here is a simple 5 step plan for developing and delivering your One Community Forum:

## **Confirm staffing and logistics**

The Forum needs at least one dedicated liaison to manage the planning and running of the event, invite participants, chair the event, and follow up with the resulting actions and liaise between the parties involved. Staff may decide to have an intern or graduate support with the logistics and following activities from the Forum to add capacity and support engagement particularly with students. This staffing should also include who you need to support with activities following the Forum.

## **Decide the Forum topic and focus**

Before Forum planning can start, identify an overarching theme. This will help tailor the guest list, pinpoint the required research, and focus the post-forum actions. Consult your

stakeholders to ensure that your theming is as relevant to university and community aims and needs as possible. It may be that you decide to hold an initial pathfinder event to inform your understanding and shape your approach (you'll find details later in the toolkit). We recommend either framing the Forum topic as a question or selecting a broader theme/topic through which multiple issues are explored.

## **Plan resources required and make it accessible**

We would recommend the university support any costs relating to travel costs (for students and community organisation) and catering, and any costs relating to event hire space. Institutions could go further by paying students and/or community organisations for their time to participate in the event. This makes the event more accessible, and is likely to open up the participation to individuals who may face additional barriers to opportunities, which is highly valuable for hearing their perspective about what is needed to engage a wider student and community body in these and following activities.

### **Invite attendees**

Get in touch with current and potential partners in the community to invite them to the Forum. Aim to give at least 4 weeks' notice. You may want to meet with or phone community partners to learn more about them before they attend the Forum, and their relationship with the university.

### **Hold the Forum, debrief and plan ahead**

After the Forum has been held, key stakeholders involved in planning future activities meet to debrief and reflect on the outputs and outcomes of the Forum and what next steps (both short-term and long-term) need

to be taken. This includes following up with attendees to outline the plan of action, involving or recruiting students and community partners, creating activity plans or conducting further research required.

"The [One Community Forum] that you held was absolutely brilliant, that was really nice to feel connected to other people from other schools who were working with you, different partner people, that was really helpful to me... It reminded me how important this sort of thing is, it does mean students get access to schools that they would not necessarily be able to in the same way." Teacher from our 2020 Virtual One Community Forum.

**"[The highlight of the event was] meeting people from different organisations with a shared interest in helping Southampton be a great city to live and work in."**

Attendee from our Southampton 2018 One Community Forum

## Inviting attendees



**It is important for you to reach out to a wide range of individuals both in the university, student body and community to do this work most effectively. Have you contacted the following?**

City Council

Your Student Union

Student Union societies or clubs (relevant to your topic/theme)

Course/student representatives (where applicable)

Your local volunteering service(s) and non-profit infrastructure support organisations

Charities, social enterprises, CICs and other SMEs in your local geographical area

Service users of local businesses/organisations relevant to your topic/theme

Schools and local youth services (if youth based theme/topic)

Local MPs or councillors

University policy manager(s)

Recommended Council services

This is not an exhaustive list, but may help you get started on who you might contact. We would recommend up to 40 attendees for a Forum, and ideally no less than 20. Aim for participants

to be fairly equally distributed between university staff, community organisations and students - with at least 1 student per group for activities.

### Community invitees

Send an exploratory email (or have a phone call) with potential attendees to share more about the event, what you hope to achieve, and why you think their input would be valuable. Ask them to recommend other organisations/individuals to get in touch with. If they cannot attend, capture their thoughts with a consultation survey. Think about how you can capitalise on the time after the Forum e.g. by providing a networking lunch, or providing your community organisations a tour of the campus.

### Student invitees

For students, we recommend a sign up form which allows you to follow up directly with them to share more about the Forum and provide targeted support. We recommend at least 4 weeks' notice with clear check in points before the Forum to ensure they still plan to attend. Give your student participants an opportunity to discuss with you prior to the event (at least 48 hours beforehand) what is expected of them. This can help to alleviate concerns, clarify the order of the event, and what level of engagement is expected from them.

### University invitees

Give university staff a clear reason why they have been invited to attend, what purpose the Forum serves, and what benefit(s) attendance will provide to their work and goals. Provide a brief to university staff of what is expected of them (e.g. are they going to be acting as note-takers or facilitators for their table groups), who else is attending, and what you expect the outcomes to be.

## Designing a pathfinder event

The aim of the pathfinder event is to support your planning and provide more contextual information to the attendees to shape their understanding of the issue(s) and their action planning. This prior event is optional but advised to get the most from your chosen topic and Forum.

Ideally, a pathfinder event can include people who are unlikely to come to your event to avoid duplicating input, and who have particular expertise in your topic. It offers a chance to expand your knowledge on social issues, challenges or barriers which might be related to your central theme, and understand the research or knowledge gaps which can inform your practice.

Logistics area	We recommend...
Time, date, location, in-person/virtual	1 hour, virtual or in-person (depending on location of participants)
Number of attendees (maximum: 10)	We recommend this is a whole group discussion
How to design the event i.e. questions and central issues which you would like more information on	We recommend having a bank of questions from which you can pick and choose based on the direction of the discussion
Your communications plan	<p>Collating your ideal guestlist, sending invites and asking attendees who can't make it to either send a relevant colleague or share another contact who could attend.</p> <p>You may also want to use relevant networks to get in touch with individuals you may not know directly</p>
Your agenda for the event	Including the invitation to the pathfinder event, what your event aims to achieve, and why the participants' input at this stage would be valuable
Resources required	<p>Use a variety of resources e.g. papers, pens, markers, or virtual resources such as Miro or Jamboards.</p> <p>Decide whether you will record the event (if so, inform participants in advance), whether you will minute the event, and how you will share the information provided. You may want to consider Chatham House rules. Include this information in your communications to help invitees decide whether to attend.</p> <p>You may need a recording device and/or a minute taker. We recommend a minute taker be an impartial person who is not involved in the discussion itself.</p> <p>You will need a Chair to lead the discussion and facilitate the question bank.</p>
Your action and communications plan for after the event	<p>Reflect on the information provided and if it changes or alters your approach to your event, or any of your activities.</p> <p>Consider how you will share this information with your attendees, and how it will shape their understanding of the central topic. Thank the attendees, and keep them informed about how the pathfinder event has contributed to your outcomes.</p>

# Designing your One Community Forum

Once a key theme is decided with input from other individuals, event planning can begin. Things to consider are:

Logistics area	We recommend...
Time, date, location, in-person/virtual	On campus or in a community/civic centre, in-person, up to 3 hours
Number of attendees (minimum: 20; maximum: 40)	Creating groups of 4-5 people for your activities
How to design the activity groups	<p>At least 2-3 separate interactive group activities, with at least 1 student per group</p> <p>Groups can include a chair/facilitator and a note-taker (these may be the same individual but they need to know prior to the event this is their role).</p> <p>NOTE: If group chairs/facilitators are not appointed or briefed effectively, you may not collect the level of information needed from your groups about their discussions and action planning. You will need these resources to do effective reflection on what has been learnt from the event, any key themes or topics, and how you can start planning further action on these issues.</p>
Your communications plan for the event	<p>Plan a series of emails and reminders to go out about the event (tailored to university, community and student audiences respectively).</p> <p>Your student reminders can also include a session pre-Forum to support them with managing expectations and an understanding how they can best participate</p>
Your agenda for the event	Share in advance with timings and include breaks
Resources required	We would advise using a variety of resources e.g. papers, pens, markers, or virtual resources such as Miro or Jamboards
Your communications plan for after the event	<p>Aim to keep attendees informed of progress made with actions from the event, and when individuals will be involved in actioning the work from the event</p> <p>NOTE: Ideally, the One Community Forum is a small part of a much larger initiative scaling new social action and partnership opportunities for students and your community to participate in. Have a plan which you can present at the Forum for your timeline of launching any projects/events/activities which have been shaped by the Forum's research, and how you plan to sustain the new or existing relationships with the Forum participants.</p>

# 7. After the Forum

Have a staff debrief to review event outcomes, and to begin formulating plans for what actions are going to happen as a result.

In reviewing outcomes from the forum, you may decide that you need additional input before agreeing next steps. If so, we recommend an open consultation online form which is kept available before and after the main Forum, which those who declined or could not attend can contribute to.

Questions you might want to ask in this form are:

- The name, organisation, and follow up contact details of the contributor (including a privacy notice about how this data will be used)
- Open ended questions which encourage comments about the topic/issues

- Ranking questions which encourage the participant to share what is important to them
- Suggestions for which individuals/organisations could support the action planning phase of this work
- Suggestions for what actions should be taken in response to this central theme or issue
- Additional feedback the participant can provide on your approach to this topic/issue

You may also wish to do focus groups or other targeted work with certain groups who are identified as being involved in supporting this theme or issue, or a post-event roundtable.

# Your event checklist



Logistics area	Questions to ask...	Should take place...
Roles and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What budget do we have, what does our timeline look like, what staff capacity do we have, and what other resources and networks can we access?</li> <li>• Who is liaising with attendees and stakeholders?</li> <li>• Who is chairing the Forum?</li> </ul>	<p>Between 2-3 months prior to the Forum</p> <p>Your pathfinder event event(s) should happen 1 month prior to the Forum</p>
Defining your goal and topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who can I speak to and what sources can I refer to which would allow us to decide on a theme?</li> <li>• Do we need to hold a pathfinder event prior to our Forum to gather additional information and insights?</li> </ul>	Between 2-3 months prior to the Forum
Engaging participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What barriers might any attendees face in attending this event?</li> <li>• How can we support individuals to access and input into this event?</li> <li>• What information do our attendees need to know to inform their participation?</li> </ul>	Attendees should be contacted with at least 3-4 weeks of lead time to attend
Designing the session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What information do we need and research do we need to undertake to run this event?</li> <li>• What activities would make the best use of our attendees' time and knowledge as an in-person session?</li> <li>• If we have to run the session virtually, how can we adapt the session content and design to be more engaging for this format?</li> <li>• What challenges do you anticipate in running this event and how might you mitigate these?</li> <li>• What clear information can I provide about accessing the event venue if attendees may never have visited before?</li> </ul>	At least 2 days before the Forum
Event wrap up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you disseminate Forum outcomes and to whom?</li> <li>• How will you agree actions and next steps?</li> <li>• How will you determine the need for further consultation and how might you undertake this?</li> <li>• What opportunities are there for future work, collaboration and partnership with event attendees?</li> </ul>	In the week following the Forum

# 8. Developing Forum Activities

Having a plan or a journey map to understand what the goals are of this work, and when you would expect to deliver activities is vital to the activities' success. You also need to ensure that key stakeholders understand the overarching objectives of the work, how learnings are being collated, and that responsibility for continuing this work is held with multiple people where possible.

Once you have compiled the research, reflections and key action points from the Forum, the next step is to agree, design, and launch activities.

In doing this, we would recommend considering:

- What are your short-term objectives? What do you want to launch and deliver within the next three months?
- What information is still missing or not comprehensive enough to take action? How can you find this information in the next 3-6 months?
- What are your long-term objectives? What do you want to have achieved in the next 12

months as a result of the Forum's research and recommendations?

- Who is responsible for delivering this activity in the short-term?
- Who is responsible for delivering this activity in the long-term?
- What budget and resource can be allocated to ensure that short-term activities are evaluated, reflected upon, and learnings implemented in other work or activities?
- What budget and resource can be allocated to ensure that long-term goals and achievements are evaluated, reflected upon, and learnings implemented in other work or activities?
- How will you measure and evidence impact?
- How will you communicate about your plans and progress, including keeping forum attendees and contributors informed?
- Identifying opportunities for student involvement and barriers and other costs associated (e.g. activity costs, travel costs, resources, virtual involvement etc)

# Example Journey Map

## 18 months onwards:

Assess goals met in the original objectives. Decide if the process needs to start again with a new issue or deepening understanding of current issue facing 18+ months on.

## 1-3 months:

Review and start delivery plans for activities agreed from Forum on educational attainment.

Set 12-18 months objectives.

## 12-18 months:

Confirm long-term sustainability of activities, development, improvement and scaling required to better meet community needs. Develop new activities as required.

## 3-6 months:

Deliver planned activities, collect evaluation data and case studies. Debrief with team about success and challenges involved in delivery.

## 6-12 months:

Continue delivery and adapt activities where required. Speak to students and community groups about their views on the success of initiatives and next steps.

## Case study

Following Student Hubs' November 2020 virtual One Community Forum which aimed to explore 'How university students could support their communities to tackle challenges relating to educational attainment since the impact of Covid-19', our Southampton Hub focused one key outcome of the event, which was around how students could tackle digital exclusion in the short-term. This became a local project called DigiDonors. The project began when David, a student and Student Hubs volunteer, was motivated to close the digital poverty gap in the city by repurposing unused laptops and donating them to young people to support their learning from home. The Southampton Hub team used their networks and connections to raise the profile and facilitate this work, as well as be responsible for collecting the equipment. Between February 2021 to July 2022, the team received 39 laptops, donating 17 of them to local children and 14 to Jamie's Computers, one of their community partners in the city.



# Developing your activities



## Checklist

Create a journey map which includes a timeline for delivery, tasks and resources required, and an overview of what input is needed from stakeholders. You may want to also map this journey map against any strategic goals your university/department/faculty has which you are trying to meet and evidence, and set touchpoints and review points within this map

Allocate resources (i.e. budget, staffing) and review how you will sustain the activities, and if additional input is needed from other senior leaders to ensure this work is taken forward

Reflect on your department/faculty/team culture and what ethos you want to bring to this delivery. What importance are you putting on these activities and long-term work? How are you demonstrating this with your staffing capacity and resource allocation? How is it embedded into the culture of your team and staff?

Refer back to the events checklists and use these headings to start planning your projects and activities

Liaise with the expected stakeholders (i.e. students, community organisations). You may want to account for deeper listening exercises in sustaining this work such as interviews, focus groups, and case studies

Ensure monitoring and evaluation is embedded within the scope of your activities for both students and/or community partners, and take time following the end of your activity to review the monitoring and evaluation information, reflect on learnings, and share lessons with other relevant colleagues and stakeholders

## Case study

In 2017 Student Hubs' Oxford Hub delivered a One Community Forum which had a broad theme of discussing the issues facing young people, with a particular focus on young people being academically and vocationally productive; socially and civilly connected; physically healthy; and mentally healthy, as framed in Oxfordshire County Council's strategy.

As a result of the Forum in 2017, the local Council and community partners attendees identified Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill, Barton and Littlemore as key geographic areas to focus interventions, where there are high levels of child poverty. The University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes, as well as Oxford Hub, gained a better understanding of the challenges faced by young people in these areas which led to several new initiatives in the following academic year on providing sports volunteering, supporting early years' provision, drama and arts workshops and more.

One student said:

*"I am passionate about sports and the impact that it can have on young people. I was injured this year so it has been amazing being able to put my passion for sport into this project. The kids are now more aware of different ways of being active ... [They] don't necessarily want to do sport and be active so there is such a sense of achievement when they do get involved! From a personal[al] point of view, it's helped me to get more experience by putting myself out of my comfort zone and being confronted with things that I haven't done before."*

# 9. Key Takeaways

The One Community Forum supports your university to:

- Engage students and community organisations in meaningful consultation about tackling social issues together
- Engage university staff from across various departments in an interactive way, making connections and fostering new partnerships
- Learn about what barriers to participation is faced by students and community organisations, which can support future design of activities/projects/initiatives
- Hold a starting point for impactful project development, and co-creation activities.

Beyond the Forum, strong social action and co-production initiatives also require robust programme and activity design, which can't only rest on the starting stages (such as the delivery of the Forum). As community solutions are built, universities have a burden

to also provide students and community groups with the tools, skills and access to opportunities to envision bold solutions, as neither students or community participants can do that effectively without support, resources and training. The community partners and participants who work with them in these activities are likely to be experts in their own fields, contexts and delivery, and their input and expertise should be taken with equal value as to what the university can provide.

Ultimately, it is in all facets of the experience both for students and communities in which the real impact lies, and the commitment to deeply embedded co-production for both parties needs to run through the entire experience in order to be a success.

### **SUPPORT FROM STUDENT HUBS:**

If you would like support with running a One Community Forum and following activities/project delivery, please get in touch.

There are many benefits to working with a third party like us in the designing and implementation of this activity, including:

- Our role as a charity allows us to engage with community organisations on a shared understanding, and we have often found our partnership with the university has enabled us to re-engage organisations with university initiatives who may have had previously challenging experiences

- Our work is centred on designing student social action opportunities which are impactful, engaging and involve student voice and leadership in their creation
- We provide added capacity for delivering not only the Forum event, but the crucial after-event work and resulting activities, which can be challenging for institutions to implement

# 10. Appendix - Example Case for Support for Universities

## ONE COMMUNITY FORUM

One Community Forums are facilitated spaces which bring together key members of the local community such as community leaders, students, and university staff from a diverse range of backgrounds to design initiatives to solve community related challenges. Since 2017, Student Hubs has designed and hosted One Community Forums with the support of the UPP Foundation, with their work featured in this publication outlining the UPP Foundation's five year strategy.

One Community Forums can be used to identify ways in which institutions, the student body, and the local community can work together to create initiatives and action plans to support the local social economy. A thriving local economy curated in a collaborative approach can influence other localities by sharing practices and ideas. The structured facilitation provided in the form of a One Community Forum identifies the 'how', creating the building blocks for relationships and ideas which turn into achievable action.

## Example: Student Hubs' 2020 One Community Forum

In November 2020, Student Hubs held their virtual One Community Forum. The intended outcome of this event was to adapt and design activities which bridged the educational attainment gap of children aged 7-14 following the impact of COVID-19. The event included Hub staff delivering youth programmes, students and university and community stakeholders such as local school teachers and council representatives. Across 3 hours, the event included breakout activities, discussion spaces, and space for scoping and planning activities to be launched from January 2021. The overall outcome of the One Community Forum and resulting activities saw 19 projects delivered (7 of which were brand new as a direct result of the Forum's input) which engaged 370+ student volunteers, 70+ community partners and 1500+ young people in the 2020-21 academic year. For more information about our event you can read [Student Hubs' blog](#).

### ACTION PLANNING AND ACTIVITIES POST-EVENT

The One Community Forum and the preceding activities (e.g. the stakeholder mapping, the optional roundtable event, the gathering of attendees) provide a foundation for the main body of work which will support the university to deliver outputs and measurable economic impact.

There are key challenges which universities face in creating and delivering knowledge exchange and community-based activities is the meaningful involvement, co-creation and delivery of activities by students,

and in the shaping and partnership of the organisations/community groups involved in this work. Initiatives designed for target groups in the community without the involvement or input of these groups prior to project formation reduce the effectiveness of the activities, the buy-in from the community, and provide challenges in retention and engagement from any students involved.

The One Community Forum helps address these challenges by bringing small representative groups together to map issues and discuss barriers. Following the Forum, the aim is to create short-term initiatives which will deliver against its objectives, but also to begin the long-term work of creating more reciprocal dialogue with the community the initiatives are looking to serve and meet the needs of.

Activity	Staff support required	Enabling the university to...
Delivery of the One Community Forum	<p>Staff liaison(s) to lead on the Forum planning, guestlist, design and facilitation of the overall Forum, including engaging students, university staff and community organisations as participants</p>	<p><b>Gather insight and research</b></p> <p>Supporting guests to feed into the university's strategy and understanding about designing and delivering community activities with students</p> <p><b>Build partnerships</b></p> <p>Bring students, university stakeholders and community organisations into a collaborative space in which partnerships can be built or developed upon</p>
Debriefing from the Forum	<p>Event planner(s) would chair a strategy and action planning meeting with the project/activities staff involved.</p> <p>The aim of this meeting would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To distil the key points and actions from the participants</li> <li>• To understand what support students and community representatives need from the university to meet their needs</li> <li>• To outline barriers and challenges faced, and ways to overcome these</li> <li>• To collate and refine the stakeholder mapping activities to highlight which key community partners to involve in project work</li> <li>• To begin planning projects which would address the key issues raised at the event</li> </ul>	<p><b>Create impactful short-term projects</b></p> <p>The Forum enables university design or alter delivery plans for activities in the community which would meet the objectives of the Forum</p> <p><b>Alter or amend existing practice</b></p> <p>Input from students and communities about the barriers and challenges faced to engagement in existing activities, or the support needs of these groups, will help to shape the learning and development of knowledge exchange staff and change their delivery plans.</p>

Activity	Staff support required	Enabling the university to...
Designing short-term projects from the Forum	<p>Staff will support with the implementation of projects. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leading recruitment and training for students who take part in this work, including support with accessible communications and programme design, and inputting on other student requirements (e.g. expenses for travel costs, resources, logistics required)</li> <li>Leading recruitment and communications with community partners, using the stakeholder mapping delivered by the graduate(s) and following up with Forum attendees</li> <li>Inputting into the impact measurement framework for the projects and the knowledge base: supporting the creation of systems which means the work can be replicated and scaled in the long-term, and meaningful evidence and data collected during and at the end of project timescales</li> </ul>	<p><b>Create projects which meet objectives</b></p> <p>Staff can have support with scaling and launching ambitious projects which meet the needs of their communities</p> <p><b>Evidence university capacity to the community</b></p> <p>The short projects provide clear evidence to the community of what resources and capacity the university has to meet their needs, and can be a starting point for longer term discussions about sustaining relationships and initiatives.</p>
Building strong communications networks internally and externally	<p>Staff will act as the bridge between all participants of the Forum and the project partners. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overseeing the various strands of the projects launched, keeping in touch with key stakeholders, community partners and students, and sharing progress updates with groups</li> <li>Email updates with participants, feedback forms from the event collected and analysed, and ongoing updates about project progress and final outcomes</li> <li>Support for university partners with collection of impact and evidencing, such as holding focus groups, creating and collating impact forms</li> <li>Any other long-term work required to sustain the development of the university partner's activities e.g. continuing to develop stakeholder mapping activities, or identifying longer term projects or sustainable practises which can outlast the funding period to improve knowledge exchange practice locally</li> </ul>	<p><b>Build lasting relationships</b></p> <p>A vital part of delivering listening activities and co-creation is for those participants to know that their contribution was valued and shaped further action. Particularly for students and community groups, who may not have been as closely involved in creation of activities prior to the Forum, being clear and accountable is key for developing and improving relationships with these groups. Strong communication in the short-term will also encourage these participants to engage in future events, and through word of mouth enable them to connect the university with a wider network of potential participants.</p>



UPP Foundation  
1st Floor, 12 Arthur Street  
London EC4R 9AB

T: +44 (0)20 7398 7200  
F: +44 (0)207 398 7201  
[upp-foundation@upp-ltd.com](mailto:upp-foundation@upp-ltd.com)

[upp-foundation.org](http://upp-foundation.org)