Contents

Introduction 4

What is ‘community’? 6

The six principles of community involvement 7

Levels of community involvement 8

Phases of involvement 10

Community involvement – points to bear in mind 11

Access to involvement 12

A community involvement approach 13

Making links 14

Strategic themes 15
Introduction

The aim of this toolkit is to provide a practical resource to help understand the concepts of community involvement, to provide background information and guidance on developing community involvement within museums, libraries are archives, and to provide resource banks for working with specific community groups e.g. asylum seeker and refugee audiences. Throughout 2004 – 2008 a series of additional resources for working with travellers, prisoners and young offenders, the gay and lesbian community and many more will also be developed to accompany this toolkit.

Photo credit: Kirklees Community History Service
“If social inclusion policies are to be fully effective, it is vital that individuals and representatives from excluded and community groups are involved in developing, introducing and monitoring the service. Establishing and maintaining these links is time consuming, but every opportunity should be taken for fostering community consultation and partnership”

(Libraries For All, DCMS 1999)

YMLAC has been working with a range of agencies to explore and enhance the capacity of museums, libraries and archives to work with various cultural and community groups in the region. This toolkit is aimed at people working in the sector who want to improve community involvement with various groups. The toolkit is based upon research into current best practice examples and partnership working. The toolkit should be used by practitioners who will be directly engaging with the communities, and by senior managers who should act to ensure that all audience development work is mainstreamed into strategic planning. Audience development projects are more successful if they have a strong sustainability element.
What is ‘community’?

Community is most often used to mean a geographical community in which people live. It is also accepted that community can be used to mean people with a common interest or perspective. Community is understood as both geographically based e.g. around neighbourhoods, and as identity based e.g. in relation to age, race, gender, and educational needs.

‘Community’ is seen as a good thing and there are policies and programmes coming out of most government departments instructing agencies to work more closely with communities. It is hoped that people working in museums, libraries and archives, whether employed by public or private sector agencies, will want to meet the challenges of community involvement and to further the work of involving existing and potential users in the service. However, it is recognised that any work to meet the challenges of community involvement, and to further the work to involve communities in a meaningful way, is additional to many people’s core tasks, and is likely to require a broader range of knowledge and skills. The aim of these materials is to help you to develop an understanding of the various communities and cultures, and to develop ideas and a strategic framework in which your organisation can engage with communities.
### The six principles of community involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The necessity of understanding the community / communities you are working with – composition, needs, priorities, tensions, strengths, existing networks etc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The need for partnership working and resourcing of participation at all stages of the process and the need for recognition of long term involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Sensitivity around accountability and representation structures – building effective groups / structures that strengthen communities rather than divide them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The need for a range of wider (formal and informal) ways in which people can participate – creating some community ownership and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The need for clarity and recognition of influences e.g. evidence that communities have been heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The recognition that people participate from a variety of starting points and cultural experiences and that this has implications for how people learn and contribute</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Levels of community involvement

Different strategies can be used to promote involvement. You need to be clear about the level at which you want to involve people, recognising that this may change over time or as the project develops.

**Levels of Participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Participation</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Consultation</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>In planning</td>
<td>The full involvement of groups, individuals and organisations in all aspects of planning or service delivery</td>
<td>Gathering the views and comments of individuals, groups and organisations on partnership plans and / or services</td>
<td>Informing individuals, groups and organisations of partnership plans and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In service delivery</td>
<td>The occasional participation of groups, individuals and organisations in some aspects of partnership planning or service delivery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Passive (e.g. leaflets / newsletters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Active (e.g. meetings / presentations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Levels of Participation

Another approach is to consider the roles that the audience are to play in the project or the service. Consider whether you want the communities to be involved as:

- Beneficiaries and users of the service
- Consultees and representatives of opinion
- A focus for general activities
- Deliverers of service and generators of development
- Potential long term partners

The level of support and learning people may require will depend upon the level at which they become involved. For example, if people are solely involved as beneficiaries and users of service, then they are likely to need up-to-date information on the services and facilities available. However, if you are trying to involve people themselves as a source of general community activity, then they may need to learn group work skills, be linked into relevant networks and be provided with some specific training around working with communities and other agencies.

Photo credit: Kirklees Community History Service
Communities are complex, and individuals within the groups and communities may have different perspectives and agendas. Conflict within groups is always a possibility. You will need to think through what you are aiming to achieve, consider some options, and plan what should happen.

**Beginnings**

The phase at which something triggers the need to involve people, and you start to think what that involves.

**Planning**

The phase when you think through the process, make the first contacts, and develop an approach.

**Involvement**

The phase in which you use methods and techniques to involve people.

**Sustainability**

What happens in this phase will depend very much on the level of participation – you may be reporting back on consultation, or at another level setting up partnerships. Before starting an involvement process it is important to reflect on the role you have the ‘hat’, you are wearing. The way you act may be influenced by how far you control resources, how decisions are made within your service and to whom you are answerable. People’s attitudes to you will certainly be influenced by the role and power they think you have.
Community involvement – points to bear in mind

It is essential to clarify the purpose of participation – this will determine who benefits and how.

Here are a few points to consider as you work through the involvement process:

• Bear in mind that people have limited patience and attention

• How will you deal with long development times?

• Be sure everyone understands the constraints: what the process will not achieve for them. Unrealistic expectations can only lead to disillusionment

• Be realistic about what can be achieved with the time and resources available.

• Don’t underestimate people.

• Give them tools to manage complexity, don’t shield them from it

• Divide the activities / learning / issues into bite-sized chunks

• Start with people’s own concerns and the issues relevant to them. Don’t superimpose your own ideas and solutions at the outset

• Help people to widen their perceptions of the choices available and to clarify the implications of each option

• Build in visible early successes to develop the confidence of participants

• Continuously review and widen membership. As new interests and groups are discovered how will they be integrated into the process?

• Help people to build their understanding of complex and remote decision processes which are outside the delegated powers of the participation process but which are affecting the outcomes

• Nurture new networks and alliances

• Plans must be opportunities for reflection and appraisal

• Make sure people are having fun!
Access to involvement

There are often barriers to people becoming involved – some of these may be obvious in hindsight but are easily forgotten in the planning process! Below is a checklist:

• Timing – is it convenient?

• Place – do people feel comfortable about the venue?

• Childcare responsibilities – should a crèche be arranged or childcare costs be covered?

• Age – should you go to meet children, young people, older people at schools, clubs etc, rather than expect them to come to your meetings?

• Formality and literacy – will people be put off by the style of meetings and expectations of high levels of literacy and confidence?

• Cultural / racial issues – should written information be translated?

• What cultural factors might be relevant to the timing and place of meeting, and provision of refreshment?

• Disability - Is the building accessible? Should a signer be provided at meetings?

• Poverty – should expenses be paid to allow people to participate?

And do not forget that access is about more than making it easy to meet or understand materials. For example, do ‘community leaders’ reflect the interests of those they may claim to represent?
A community involvement approach

The following is a checklist for community involvement practice developed by someone working in the cultural heritage sector.

- Identify the community groups you are going to work with
- Be honest about what is possible
- Find some key contacts in the group / community or invite them to an event
- Get to know them and try to establish some trust between you
- Build up working relationships
- Ask them what they would like
- Contact groups within the community – facilitate discussions of services and facilities and show that their suggestions are valued and their needs are recognised
- Hold some general consultations e.g. citizens panel, questionnaires, focus groups, meetings and workshops etc.
- Establish a community panel / group for a regular and ongoing relationship, consultation, partnership, and evaluation

Photo credit: Kirklees Community History Service
Making links

As stated above, most people working in cultural heritage neither have the time nor specific training and skills to undertake community development. However, you do have lots of other knowledge and skills to share and by working with others you can help to make the sector more open, welcoming and relevant to people’s needs.

The kinds of people you might want to work alongside, or form partnerships with could include:

- Community (development) workers
- Regeneration workers
- Community education workers
- Health visitors
- Youth workers
- Community arts workers

These people may be located in a variety of settings including the local authority, council for voluntary service, local voluntary sector organisations, Primary Care Trusts, Sure Start Projects, Health Action Zones, SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) schemes. Working in partnership with other agencies is not only about bringing together complementary skills but also about developing a more co-ordinated approach to community involvement which avoids duplication and maximises the use of resources such as information about community contacts and networks. Many funding bodies will look more favourably at initiatives at projects that demonstrate a collaborative approach between agencies and with communities. Effective joint or partnership working is not however always easy and tensions can easily arise. It is important to initially spend some time discussing the purpose of joint working and how you will work together in order to ensure that there is clear agreement at the outset about what you are doing. This includes:

- What are your aims and rationale for working together?
- What is each of you bringing to the achievement of these aims?
- What will be the respective roles and responsibilities of the different people / agencies involved?
Strategic themes

There are three key strategic themes that need to be addressed in order to increase community involvement.

1. **Inclusivity** – ensuring inclusive and equal access to involvement
   - Equal opportunities / social inclusion policies are implemented
   - Community involvement is enhanced through implementation of the service access policy
   - Real and perceived barriers to access are broken down
   - A range of community needs are reflected in service provision

2. **Capacity** – building understanding, skills and knowledge across all partners
   - An ‘in service’ organisational policy for community involvement is in place
   - Staff are trained and motivated to work with different groups as part of their personal and professional development
   - Communities (and individuals) are empowered through involvement in the cultural heritage sector
   - Museums, libraries and archives are recognised by Communities and other agencies as learning centres
   - Core funding is provided for sustained provision
   - Evaluation is undertaken in order to continually improve practice

3. **Influence** – ensuring community involvement leads to change at both strategic and operational level
   - Communities are enabled to participate in service planning and development
   - Mutually beneficial partnerships are developed across the sector domains and with other agencies
   - There is two-way communication and dissemination of information between services and communities
We welcome your feedback

We hope you have found this resource useful. If you have used any of these resources, we would be very grateful for any feedback.

Should you wish to make any comments about this resource, please:

Write to Nina Baptiste, Access and Audience Development Manager
Yorkshire Museums, Libraries & Archives Council at:
nina.baptiste@ymlac.org.uk

Please visit our website for new or updated Resource Banks: www.ymlac.org.uk

Disclaimer:

We have done our best to ensure that the information contained in this document is correct. YMLAC is not responsible for any incorrect information.

Copyright:

YMLAC is happy for you to copy the contents of this resource. If you do this, please acknowledge YMLAC as the source, thank you.