

# Parks and Green Spaces: Engaging your local community with your park

This guide gives advice on how to engage your local community and encourage local people to use your park. It can help you to generate ideas and form an action plan.

## Who lives and works nearby?

**Get your group together to look at a map of the local area.**

Make a list of all the amenities, housing types and facilities that are within a 20 minute walk of the park.

- Are there any schools nearby?
- What sorts of housing is there and where do people gather?
- Are there any offices or big employers in the area?
- Is there a care home or health facility nearby?
- Is there a church or mosque in the vicinity?

**Think about what type of park or space you have and what amenities that are on offer.**

- Do you have a café on-site, or are there large open spaces suitable for dog walkers?
- Is there a children's play area or are you planning one?
- Is a running track or playing field part of the green space?
- Is your park suitable for events? A walkabout performance of Shakespeare, or a mini festival can attract diverse audiences in.

This will help you to build a picture of how the park fits into the wider local area, and the types of audiences you might want to attract into the space.

## Building an engagement plan

Using a template like the one below, begin by agreeing your purpose for involving local people in the park. Make this a header to ensure it remains your main focus.

Purpose: to encourage a wide range of people locally to access and enjoy the park, run activities and benefit from the open space

Stakeholder or audience	Level of Engagement (Inform, Consult, Partner, Empower)	Aims	Proposed Activity	£	Who	When	Communication Message
Primary School	Partner	To encourage <u>teachers</u> use the park for children's activities	Write a letter to the head Speak to individual teachers Offer a visit to the park		Marie	January	The park is here as a resource! There is a wildlife garden for bug hunts What can we do together to help make the space welcoming to children?

### Column One – Levels of engagement

Add your key audiences into the first column. For example, if you have a primary school nearby, school children, teachers and their parents may be key audiences.

Think about who you are aiming to engage, what messages might work best, and what channels will work to share information.

People who are already involved with the park often make the best ambassadors, so start there! There are often trusted networks of information sharing amongst communities.

- If you have a parent or teacher in your group, they may be able to help form key messages and have ideas of what might work to involve them.
- A member of the group may attend the local mosque and could help form key messages about the park to that community.

As you populate the plan, you may find that there are some communities that are un or under-represented. Think about how best to reach them and who may be able to help.

## Column Two – Levels of engagement

This column looks at the level of engagement that you ideally would like to have with a key audience or group of people.

For this template, we have suggested four levels: **Inform, Consult, Partner and Empower**.

### Inform

This involves letting people know that the park is available to them. This may be through word of mouth, a leaflet or social media. Messages may include, where to find the park, opening times (if applicable) and key facilities.

### Consult

A group may have particular interest. For example, residents overlooking the park may be interested to know how a particular event may affect them and will need to be consulted on planning issues such as a plan to install a games facility, or floodlights.

### Partner

Service providers, such as Park Run, may want to discuss activities that could take place in the park. A school/college may want to partner with your group to develop programmes. The local wildlife trust may want to run conservation walks, highlighting the different species of birds or trees.

### Empower

Empowerment involves a deeper level of engagement.

You may be looking to empower people who have not previously benefitted from the park, for example people who experience barriers to using the park. Finding out what these barriers are is important. You can then work together to create an inclusive and welcoming space.

You may also seek to empower existing users of the space. For example, young people who have created a BMX trail through some woodland, who currently do not have a say in how things are run but may have good ideas on how to improve the space.

### **Column Three and Four – aims and activities**

The next column defines your aims for each target group. Ask yourself what it is that you'd like to achieve.

Once you know that, you can move on to identifying the activities that may help you achieve your aims. Some examples are given in the template above. Remember, it is fine to make small steps initially.

### **Column Five – £**

The £ column is about resources. Not only financial resources but also other factors such as volunteer time. Quantifying what you can spend on an activity can help you scope it out appropriately.

### **Column six – Who**

Who is doing what? This is important as often actions can fall on some key members of the group, who could then become overloaded. Aim for a balance and a good spread of actions among the group. If there is a gap in knowledge, the action could be to ask someone else, a neighbour, friend or colleague who may know the audience group well.

### **Column seven – When**

Make activities timebound. When is the optimum time to approach? Then you can check in on actions when they are due. Celebrate progress!

### **Column eight – communication message**

The final column is to record the key message that you'd like to get across to your audience. Think this through carefully, what would you want to know in their shoes? Update this regularly.

## Final Thoughts

You are now well on the way to creating your own engagement plan. Try to enjoy the process and revisit it often to check that it is current and relevant.

Parks are a fantastic resource with recognised benefits. We hope that this helps you to encourage more people to come together in your green space. If you'd like to link with like-minded groups, then consider joining Locality. We offer learning and skills exchanges so you can hear from others who have been there and done that, successfully.