

Social Action Toolkit

A guide to getting involved with your community



Community First
Yorkshire

What is social action?

“Social action is about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important to their communities”.¹

Social action is as simple as local people giving their time, skills and ideas to make a difference in their community and normally focuses on activities or ideas that affect the community as a whole rather than individuals, although individuals are key to making it happen. Social action could be arranging a community event, a specific project or an activity that brings local people together. By using local skills, strengths and resources, neighbours can support and connect with others, improve their local area and develop thriving, connected networks that are resilient and strong. Examples of social action could include organising a street party, preventing the closure of a local post office, helping to run a local playgroup, or improving local road safety.

This toolkit focuses on local, community activities; giving you a better understanding of what social action is, helping you think about your local context and giving you the information you need to achieve your ambitions. For simple social action activities such as a litter pick or beach clean, there will be no need to use all of the information contained in this toolkit. However, we have included more complex information should you wish to be more ambitious in your social action activity, such as developing a community garden, or organising a men’s shed or playgroup. This information can be found in our additional information boxes in the toolkit.

Informal volunteering for neighbours and formal volunteering for established voluntary sector organisations are alternative ways of getting involved in your local community; however, they are not part of this toolkit. Find out about informal volunteering through our [information sheet](#) or if you are thinking about taking part in formal volunteering, then please visit our [volunteering page](#) for advice and opportunities near you.

If you have a business idea which you think could support social action within your own community, then please read our [information sheet on businesses and community funding](#) before proceeding.

1. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Office for Civil Society & Wilson, R., 2017. [A description of social action.](#)

Getting inspired

Getting started with social action does not have to be daunting. Think about what is important to you or your neighbours in your local community. Is there a particular issue that you want to solve, for example littering or dog waste, or is there something that you would like to see developed further, such as turning the occasional neighbourhood swap shop into a regular event?

If you are not sure where to start, our [Building Connected Communities](#) poster has lots of great ideas, and offers a range of suggestions to inspire action. Be curious and take a look at the communities or neighbourhoods near you to see what they are doing. Could you do something similar or do you need to do something completely different?

Listen to how others have taken part in social action and be inspired by their actions. There are lots of great ideas in our [Stronger Together toolkit](#) and on the [North Yorkshire County Council](#) or [Eden Project Communities](#) websites.

Things to consider:

- Where do you want to make a difference? Is it just your street or your whole village or area?
- Who can you speak to for their ideas?
- What activities or events already occur in your community? You do not want to reinvent the wheel! You may want to take a look at the [North Yorkshire Connect](#) website to see what other community groups are doing in your area.





- What resources (eg: a community building such as a church or village hall, local action group, community group) do you already have in your community and how can you make use of them? Spending time walking around the local area looking at notice boards at the pub, your community building, library, doctor's surgery or church will give you an idea of what is already taking place.
- Who lives locally? Have there been any changes recently such as a new housing estate or retirement village? While you may be passionate about setting up a playgroup, it is going to be hard work if there are no young children in the area.
- Who shares a similar idea or passion? Finding these people may be key to your success.

Write down all of your ideas so that they are clear when you come to share them with others.



Resources:

- [Building Connected Communities poster](#)
- [Stronger Together toolkit](#)
- [North Yorkshire County Council](#)
- [Eden Project Communities](#)
- [North Yorkshire Connect](#)

Involving your community

Speaking to others in your community or neighbourhood about your social action idea is key if you want to develop any new projects or want to make changes in your community. It enables you to see what others are thinking and to gain their viewpoint on what matters to them. It is crucial that you hear all the different local voices and that no one feels left out of the plans or decisions. You might want to find out whether there are any conflicts or difficulties you could potentially face with your plans, or whether another group is thinking of doing or already does the same thing.

You might want to create connections with others at this stage too. Meet with local organisations and existing groups to see if they are already planning something, or to find out if they would like to get involved. Perhaps you can create something bigger together!

Making your ideas visible and involving your community can seem like an overwhelming task, particularly if you want to do larger, more complex projects or activities or where your community is more dispersed or not technologically proficient. However, our [Easy Guide to Community Engagement](#), with the accompanying [toolkit](#), contains tips and information on community engagement events and activities, including techniques and methods that might work in your context. We also have a [handy checklist](#) to ensure that you are on track.



Things to consider:

- What resources or channels of communication do you have locally which you can use to share your ideas? For example, do you have a local newsletter, notice board or village social media account? Could you use a local community building to host an event? There are some great tools out there to help you with getting the information into the wider community. For example, [Canva](#) is a really simple, free way of creating posters, social media posts and newsletters to generate interest and discussion on your idea. Our [social media factsheet](#) has hint and tips to help you get started.
- What things do you need to consider if you want to plan a community event? [Gov.uk](#) have some great advice on their website covering community events. Take a look at our [factsheet](#) on how to market your event to maximise its impact.
- What skills, knowledge or people-based resources do you have to help with the planning and implementation of your ideas? Who do you need to speak to and, if you don't know, how can you find out? How could you get different people involved rather than the usual suspects?
- What community groups are already active in your area and how can you create connections and links? Search the [North Yorkshire Connect](#) website to search for groups and activities locally.

Keep track of any comments and suggestions from the community. They will often think of things that you perhaps hadn't thought of or considered.



Additional information:

You may want to start a contact list to get in touch with people at a later stage. If you do you'll need to be aware of data protection guidelines. Please see our handy [GDPR information sheet](#) to help make sure that you're keeping data and information about people correctly.



Resources:

- [Easy Guide to Community Engagement toolkit](#)
- [Community engagement checklist](#)
- [Canva](#)
- [Social media factsheet](#)
- [Gov.uk](#)
- [Promoting your event factsheet](#)
- [North Yorkshire Connect](#)
- [GDPR information sheet](#)

Growing your idea

If you have a definite idea of the kind of social action activity you want to do, think about how you develop your idea further. Take into consideration any comments and suggestions from the local community, and if necessary, adjust your idea. Do not be afraid to think imaginatively or to think differently. Consider whether you could mix and match different ideas. This may have the additional bonus of bringing more people into the planning and implementation stages, providing additional resources and skills. Bearing in mind the resources available to you locally, agree what is achievable and blend suggestions from the community if you can.

Build on any new relationships or community connections you have made. Informally bringing a group of people together, who share the same idea, can help to start the conversation, spark ideas and encourage people to offer their skills. Make sure that everyone shares the same vision and, if not, try to find a middle ground. [Eden Project Communities](#) have some great tips on connecting with others in the community and get them 'on board' with your plans.

Think about what resources you might need to get your idea started – things like money, people, time and perhaps a location or space. Once you know what you will need, you will have a better idea of the challenges and hurdles you might face. If your project or idea is a little more complex, you may want to create an [action plan](#), including details on timelines and budget.



Things to consider:

- Who might support you and who has an interest in your idea? Who can you collaborate with? Include in your plans individuals and groups that will benefit and any that might help you.
- What resistance might you face and how will you manage it? If you can address concerns and engage these individuals in your plans, you stand a much better chance of success plus you benefit from different perspectives on the issue. They may even turn into supporters!
- How are you going to tell others in the community or neighbourhood your plans? How are you going to invite others to join you and to get the conversation started?
- What are the steps that you need to take to make your idea a reality? What do you need to plan? How can you break your idea into smaller, more manageable chunks, so that it is easier to implement? Are there any quick wins that you can achieve to gain added support and to get people interested?
- Could you do this with an existing group or organisations, or even the parish or town council? For example, if you want to start an environmental project is there an existing group in the area already? Could you join with them to do an initial joint project, while growing your idea and expertise? You could consider whether any funding could go to the existing group and then be distributed down to your local project. This might require some careful negotiation, but could be mutually beneficial.

Keep conversations going and continue listening to what others are saying to improve the long-term success of your idea.



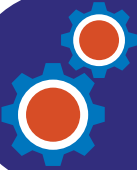


Additional information

You might want to create a terms of reference document for your group. It will help you to clarify your idea and set out what you want to achieve. Read our [fact sheet](#) for more information.

It's really important to consider how you are going to fund your idea at this stage in your planning. If your funding needs are small, you may want to do some local fundraising, but if you think you might need more substantial funding, our [funding page](#) is a good starting point for information. We often run small grant funding training so keep an eye on our [training calendar](#). You can also read our [fundraising information sheet](#) for ideas and tips on how to do local fundraising. Signing up to our monthly [Funding Bulletin](#) will also help you find grants you could apply for.

Don't forget, if you want to do any fundraising or want to consider funding, you will need a bank account and a formalised constitution document for your group. Read our factsheets on [writing a constitution](#) and [setting up a bank account](#) for more information.



Resources:

- [Eden Project Communities](#)
- [Creating an action plan template](#)
- [Terms of reference fact sheet and template](#)
- [Funding information](#)
- [Community First Yorkshire's training](#)
- [Fundraising information sheet](#)
- [Sign up to our Funding Bulletin](#)
- [Writing a constitution](#)
- [Setting up a bank account](#)

Taking action

Once you have done all the planning, it is time to take action. Write an article for the parish newsletter or magazine to tell others of your plans, or target bus stops, local shops, pubs churches. Libraries and surgeries with posters. Alternatively, consider a leaflet drop to local households or adding your activity to the [North Yorkshire Connect website](#). If appropriate, run a pilot activity to see if it highlights any issues or conflicts, improve on your ideas and to get feedback.

Bring key people together informally, to talk about the plans and how they will be implemented. Make sure that all those involved in your plans are clear on what you want to achieve and by when. If there is a venue to consider for your activity, do a walk through to ensure that it is suitable and that you will have everything that you need. Remember that you might need to do a risk assessment. You can find more information about risk assessments in our [information sheet](#) along with a [simple template](#).

Things to consider:

- Who is going to do what task? Allocating defined tasks to people will help to minimise confusion and avoid overlap, utilise existing skills and make people feel valued. [Our Action Plan template](#) can help you to do this.





- What do the initial steps in your activity or event look like? Do you need to have a big opening with lots of advertising to generate interest or do you want to start small and low key?
- Do you need any signage? For example, if you want to take photographs of your activity, a simple sign saying that photographs will be taken might be a good idea.
- What are your long-term goals and ambitions? If this was an event, is this something that the community or neighbourhood has really valued and could it be done again? If it is a short-term project, for example the clearing of a disused playground, does it need to have an end date?
- How are you going to assess what you are doing? Depending on whether you have received any funding, this could be informal or formal, but it helps to ensure that what you are doing is appreciated and worthwhile for the community. If you think your event was a success and would like to take your social action further by securing funding, you may need to gather evidence of what went well and why. Here are some tips on ways that you could [assess what you have done](#).

Make sure you keep communicating with everyone involved and the wider community or neighbourhood about your plans, carrying regular reviews to consider areas for improvement. Keep searching for new networks and connections that you can utilise to develop your ideas further. Remember that wider networks are stronger and can bring unexpected skills and resources.



Additional information:

Don't forget, if you want to carry out any fundraising or want to consider external funding, you will need a bank account and a formalised constitution document for your group. Read our factsheets on [writing a constitution](#) and setting up a [bank account](#) for more information.



Resources:

- [North Yorkshire Connect website](#)
- [Risk assessment information sheet](#)
- [Event or activity risk assessment template](#)
- [Our Action Plan template](#)
- [Assess what you have done](#)
- [Writing a constitution](#)
- [Setting up a bank account](#)

Celebrating small wins

Don't forget to celebrate small wins and small beginnings and keep going! Put an article in the local press, talk about what you've done on social media, and contact the local radio station or Community First Yorkshire to tell others what you have achieved.

Things to consider:

- Do you need to update any other local groups or organisations that supported what you did? Could you put an update into their newsletter or on their social media feed?
- What communication channels did you use to publicise what you were doing? Write a follow up piece or post some photographs of what you did. If you are going to use photographs, try to ask people for their consent before using them.
- Send an update email through your local parish or town council.
- Creating excitement and enthusiasm within your local community about your successes and achievements will help to create further interest and draw other people in. Capitalise on your successes however small.



Additional information:

If you want to use photographs or videos from an activity or event that was not public, or if you want to use a photograph for longer term marketing purposes, then you may want to obtain more formal permission by using a simple consent form such as [this one](#).



Taking things further

Congratulations! Your idea has taken off and has been a success. Your original team of people may want to expand and develop the idea or look at larger funding opportunities. This might mean that you have to formalise your group, define your objectives better or set up governance structures to keep going. We have pulled a series of resources and information sheets together to help you do that.

Click on the links below for more information.

- [Governance structures](#)
- [Insurance](#)
- [DBS/Safeguarding](#)
- [Policies/documents you need in place to secure funding](#)
- [Writing a funding proposal](#)
- [Managing volunteers](#)



You may also like to read our [Turning your idea into action](#) fact sheet for a summary of the information contained in this toolkit.

[My Community](#) brings together information from 12 organisations on how to take action in your local community, including information on improving parks and green spaces and using the assets within your community. The [Community Toolbox](#) website also has some great resources on taking action locally.



Additional support

The Community Support North Yorkshire team can provide expert advice and guidance on taking social action within your community, particularly if you're looking to formalise your group. Simply fill in an [enquiry form](#) and we'll get back to you.



Community First
Yorkshire

Registered Charity No. 515538

Unit A, Tower House, Askham Fields Lane, Askham Bryan, York, YO23 3FS
01904 704177 info@communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk
www.communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk



@CommFirstYorks



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