

# Importance of Community Centre

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## **Abstract**

Community businesses are particularly well placed to unlock creativity in our neighbourhoods. We've seen them do it after working with more than fifty community businesses over the last eighteen months through the Community Business Leaders Programmed.

## **Introduction**

Community centres or community centers are public locations where members of a community tend to gather for group activities, social support, public information, and other purposes. They may sometimes be open for the whole community or for a specialized group within the greater community. Community centres can be religious in nature, such as Christian, Islamic, or Jewish community centres, or can be secular, such as youth clubs.

When it comes to complex social challenges, like tackling rising childhood obesity, figuring out how to provide healthcare to an ageing population, or even how to unite a divided country, we cannot rely on the state alone, nor on any individual organisation. These are problems that will only be solved when many heads are involved, combining insights and experiences to think and act innovatively.

Luckily, there are people in communities across the country are showing real determination and taking responsibility to address these issues in their local areas. And they are doing it with a spirit of collaboration not competition. They believe that anyone can have a good idea; they create an atmosphere in which everyone believes that their opinions are genuinely listened to and valued; and they find the resources and ability to act on those ideas. This might seem simple but very few of the institutions around us give this room for creativity; the search for efficiency has driven out flexibility from public services and traditional business does not always consider the wider social context.

Community businesses are different; they are built of and by a community to solve a local problem or meet a local need. This might be coming together to take over a service previously run by the local council, like a leisure centre or library, or it might be a new venture altogether like setting up a community farm or growing project. There are over 7000 community businesses in England and these organisations have particular qualities which make them better suited than private business or public sector organisations in enabling people to turn ideas in local action.

Working with more than fifty community businesses over the last eighteen months, we have identified a handful of common qualities which seem to be central to community businesses successful enabling people to put their ideas into practice.

## **1 How community businesses help communities to harness their creativity:**

These are the five qualities that help community businesses support the communities in which they operate:

### **➤ How We Make Decisions**

There are different ways in which we can be involved in decision making, from being merely informed that a decision has been made through to having a core role in shaping what that decision is.

In the RSA's work on public participation we view these different forms of participation along a spectrum. The majority of the interactions we have with the organisations around us would be found at the 'inform' or 'consultation' end. If the local bus company doesn't serve the route I want, there is little I can do to influence it beyond replying to a consultation. In our public services this style was entrenched in the New Public Management approach, which, in its search for efficiency, stifled creativity and left no room for people to shape the service they received.

These examples highlight the lack of any real power being handed over to us citizens by the institutions and organisations that we interact with. This discourages creativity because there is little point in engaging if you feel that your input is neither genuinely wanted nor acted upon.

Community businesses, on the other hand, are committed to sharing power and encouraging varied and greater levels of participation. They achieve this in a variety of ways, from shareholder or member voting to regular consultations, and open door policies. These more participative approaches are built into the way the organisations run and are core to their ethos.

Take Burton Street Foundation in the Hillsborough area of Sheffield. One of the very first community asset transfers in 1998, the collection of buildings that make up Burton Street Foundation are today home to over fifty different businesses, community groups and charities, and over 2500 people visit the centre each week. The Foundation has a board of local Trustees and there are regular opportunities for user groups and for the wider community to share their ideas about the future of the centre, be it developing the overall strategy or improving support for particular groups, like pensioners. A large part of Burton Street's work is supporting adults and young people with learning and physical disabilities. Each year they hold a two week long forum with these groups to gather feedback and generate ideas for improving or developing new services. These sessions directly shape future business plan of the Foundation.

Approaches like these enable people to move from being recipients or consumers of services to co-creators, having a real say in the way these services are designed and run. Burton Street demonstrates the different levels of engagement which community businesses can provide, allowing people to get involved to a greater or lesser extent as suits them: building their skills through volunteering, joining the trustee board or just getting out of the house and meeting people. This recognises that not everyone will have the time or interest to be involved in every decision, but knowing that everyone's input is welcomed and acted upon sends an important signal.

This sharing of power reaches into the organisations themselves; a number of the businesses we've worked with are interested in non-hierarchical working structures. Oblong in Leeds, for example, is a community centre with a flat management structure which they believe empowers the staff by entrusting them with the flexibility they need to do their best work. Their approach to problem solving is an example of 'new power'; peer-driven and with a collaborative approach to problem solving.

## ➤ **How We Learn From Mistakes**

With this shared power comes the opportunity for learning what works and what doesn't. This is important for sparking new ideas. We sometimes imagine that a creative solution comes in a flash of inspiration, when in reality it is the process of learning from repeated attempts that is crucial to nailing the desired outcome. Like any other skill, creativity needs to be practised, and the best way to do this is by being involved in trying things out, learning from how they went and trying again.

At community level this is about having places and organisations that let people have a go for themselves, supporting them where they need it but also allowing them to make mistakes and learn from them. Volunteers at Squash Nutrition in Liverpool, for example, develop their own small projects with guided support from the wider team, and Redcar Development Trust do something similar when they support young people to test out their enterprise ideas. Testing and developing ideas is core to the 'fail fast' approach of the entrepreneur and community businesses can provide a secure setting for people to do this.

## ➤ **How Communities Can Partner With Other Organisations**

Community businesses have a strategic position: they can help the community identify and support local needs, and they are also in the position to work with other organisations to support larger actions, be that other community businesses, wider civil society, more traditional business or government.

The experience of delivering health and wellbeing programmes to communities in Leeds has led a number of organisations in the city to think about how they can work together and with other organisations to provide even more support. With the NHS' resources under pressure these organisations have seen the potential for formalising the role that many community businesses and other civil society organisations play in healthcare provision. Bill Graham, Manager at New Wortley Community Association is advocating for this Community Health Service, seeing it as an opportunity for the sector to invest in sharing best practice and ensuring consistently high quality standards, and relieving pressure on overstretched GPs. This is an exciting proposition driven by communities who have experienced high quality local care and see that, given the right support as part of the NHS, this potential for this to be more consistently available.

### ➤ **How One Thing Can Lead To Another**

For many communities, and individuals, there is still a big leap of imagination required between seeing a cherished institution like your local library or pub threatened to deciding to run it as a community venture. Those who take that leap are showing us that it can be done and offering inspiration to others to follow suit.



The Bevy is the only pub serving the 18,000 people who live Moulsecoomb, Bevendean and Bates housing estates in Brighton. It's owned by about 750 shareholders and run by a committee, most of whom live on the estates and who campaigned to reopen the pub after it was closed by the council for anti-social activities. Today it is more than a pub, it provides a much needed community hub and is at the heart of local initiatives to improve health and wellbeing.

Examples like this open us up to different ways of doing things, particularly when we can see them on our doorstep. The Bevy is spurring the locals on to think differently about other buildings and services in their area could be run, and the team are sharing their experience with groups from other parts of the county who want to do something similar.

### ➤ **Local Knowledge Can Generate New Ideas That Are Well-Rooted And More Likely To Succeed**

Community businesses' commitment to a particular geographical place enables them to get under the skin of the specific opportunities which exist in their area. In Barking and Dagenham, Company Drinks have tapped into the local heritage of hop picking to create a drinks brand which teaches people about growing, manufacturing and enterprise, brings generations together, and helps people connect with local history.

This in depth knowledge of a local area may enable organisations able to respond to community needs in a faster and in a more flexible way than other organisations would be able to. Opportunities described as social moments, such

as a community centre closing, offer the chance for something new to emerge and first hand community knowledge is key to making this work. Indeed, it is often an event of this kind which leads to the formation of a community business in the first place.

New Wortley Community Association in Leeds, which already runs a successful community centre, is embarking on a new project to build affordable housing on a site in the area. Because they are already established, know what the community want and are trusted, they are able to act on this opportunity to develop the site for the benefit the local residents.

From local change to large scale change

Community businesses are playing an important role in helping people take action in their local areas. Because they are small and locally focused the chain of communication is short; information can flow quickly to everyone involved, and this means that, in terms of learning from mistakes or innovating, the feedback loops can be effective. We have seen that these organisations have different ways of getting people involved in what they do. This participation is important because it widens the pool of potential ideas that can be tapped into and gives people the confidence to pursue their ideas instead of keeping them to themselves. Finally, being rooted in particular place is important because it means these organisations can draw on local knowledge and connections as a source of ideas and ways to turn them into action.

## 2 Build a Community Around Your Brand



One of the best ways to grow your small business is to create or join a larger community. There are many tactics that businesses can use to connect with their cities and regions. Building an online community is also helpful for attracting positive attention. Let's look at some of the best ways that business owners can leverage the art of community building.

### ➤ **Create a Loyalty Program**

A loyalty or rewards program is a simple way to entice customers to return regularly. Many types of businesses can set up this kind of program, including salons, coffee shops, restaurants and boutiques. Nowadays, you can go beyond the traditional method of punching a card when someone makes a purchase and use mobile apps to track customer loyalty.

Set up your program to cover both online and offline purchases. The typical loyalty program for a retail business is something along the lines of: "Buy 10 cups of coffee and get one free." You can also think of more creative rewards. You might offer special rewards for customers who accumulate a high number of purchases. Post the names and statistics of customers in your business and/or your website (with their permission, of course) to turn it into a friendly competition.

### ➤ **Partner With Other Businesses**

Very often, local businesses can strengthen their position and build community by partnering with others. This includes businesses that are complementary to your own and even competitors. For example, if you own a fitness center, complementary businesses might include those that sell athletic wear or who provide massages. If you own a restaurant, you might get together with other restaurant and food-related businesses and put together a food-tasting event.

Publish a guidebook for customers on a certain theme, such as healthcare professionals, eateries, beauty-related or home improvement services, etc. When you partner with other business owners, everyone can benefit.

### ➤ **Raise Money for Charity**

Participate in or even organize events for charity such as concerts, 5K races or fundraising auctions. This is a good way to do good in your community, meet people in the area and get publicity. If you're organizing an event yourself,

remember to notify the local press including newspapers, radio stations and local television channels. You can also donate a portion of your profits to a charity during a certain time period, such as the holidays.

Make sure you publicize this at your storefront and on your website. Sponsor a Little League, soccer or other sports team. Contributing to worthy causes and groups in your community helps everyone, including you.

### ➤ **Build Your Authority by Speaking and Teaching**

No matter what type of business you own, you probably have customers and potential customers who would like to learn more about the topic. You can build your authority and get better known in the community in a variety of ways. Consider speaking at local business events. Talk to your local library or community college.

Depending on your field and level of expertise, you might even design a non-credit course. Create a video or online course on a platform such as Udemy or Coursera. Although this provides you with online content, you can promote it offline. Post links to your videos/courses in your ads.

### ➤ **Build an Online Community**



Bigger-name brands are often adept at creating online communities with membership sites, forums and social media pages. You can borrow such tactics



and apply them to your own business, even if it's on a smaller scale. Creating a blog, YouTube channel or social media account helps you connect with both local and distant audiences and build community. The key here is to create content that's engaging rather than simply advertising. Encourage your readers and followers to submit their own content, such as comments and photos. Conduct polls to learn more about your customers. Answer comments and questions on your social media pages to encourage engagement.

These are some ways that your business can get more active in your community. Today, the online and offline worlds are increasingly merging so it's important to focus your efforts in both realms (however your own business operates). When you start thinking about the benefits of building community, you'll start to come up with ideas of your own. Think of your business not simply as products and services that you're selling but as an integral part of your community.

### **3 Grow Your community centre With Events**

#### **➤ Pull a team together**

It's really important to be clear what you are aiming to achieve from a project or event. Are you raising money, do you want to create something lasting in the community, or simply bring together a certain audience for a fun event?

Working with a team of people will make life easier. The size of this team will vary depending on the scale of the event. Don't make the team too big, as management by large committee rarely works for this kind of activity. Make sure everyone knows and understands their role and responsibilities. Use small teams with a team leader reporting back if necessary, as this will reduce the number sitting round the table as part of the core team.

#### **➤ Sort out your budget**

Create a budget and be clear where you have income generated from variables such as entrance fees, allowing a contingency for unpredicted expenses. Identify the breakeven point and be prepared to find savings if things don't pan out the way you predicted. When making savings, stick to areas that won't affect the experience of those taking part or, if relevant, the physical outcomes.

### ➤ **Get the message out**

If you want people to buy a ticket, attend or help with the event or project, they need to know what is happening. Think about the different parts of the community you live in and how best to reach them. If you require an upfront commitment think about how you are going to record the information. Make sure that any messages make it clear what you want the person to do. You could ask them to join the Facebook group, subscribe to a newsletter or simply buy a ticket.

### ➤ **Cover yourself - think safety and insurance**

Two important factors: try to prevent something going wrong and cover for it in case it does. Risk assessment is key to this. Unity Insurance Services, a specialist charity broker, advises that you will need Public Liability Cover to protect you against claims for any injury to the public or damage to other people's property. If you already have insurance, check your policy to see exactly what you are covered for, as you may need additional event insurance policy.

### ➤ **Have you got the right licenses?**

If your event is likely to feature live or recorded music or video, even if it's background music, you may need various licences. Check this out in advance. The need for a licence from your local council under the Licensing Act 2003 is currently being reviewed and some of the rules relaxed, so check with your local Licensing Officer to see if your event is exempt.

There are two separate licensing bodies to protect music as intellectual property. PPL UK licenses groups to play recorded music at public events with some of the fees going to the recording artists and record companies. PRS for Music licenses groups to play live or recorded music at public events that is still in copyright, with some of the fees going to composers.

Whether you need one or both of these licences will depend on a number of factors. You may be able to avoid one, or both of these fees if your event is private, if you use only specially recorded copyright-free music, or if the person playing the music or the venue you're using has the relevant licences themselves.

If anyone at your event is showing a video or television programme, licenses and permissions may be required. The top tip here is: don't do this unless your event depends on it.

➤ **Assess the risk and seek advice on insurance**

Think about what insurance you might need for your event and seek advice from the Association of British Insurers if you have any doubts. Particular risks to consider include the use of fireworks, bouncy castles, sports or other physical activities, large crowds, children running about, the availability of alcohol at the event or safety hazards at the venue (including outdoor events). Check with your insurance company whether your event is covered under existing household or other insurances held.

➤ **Think carefully about how you cover your costs**

Try to avoid charging an attendance fee, as this may increase some of your licence fees and may lead you into a formal contract to provide those goods and services, with the attendant risks if they are not provided or of inadequate quality.

If you choose to ask for voluntary donations, then make sure you avoid coercion. Try to find a way for people to make donations without rattling tins or collecting buckets, as you may then need a collecting licence and the regulation for public collecting is getting tougher. If you decide to hold a raffle you can avoid having to get a licence from your local council if you sell all the tickets on the day (not in advance), announce the winners on the day and keep the spending on prizes to under £500.

Kate Groves, one of the organisers of The Big Lunch, says it needn't be complicated to hold a successful community event.

➤ **Keep things simple**

Big Lunches can be big or small and take place anywhere that communities can get together – from back gardens and parks, to church halls and streets.

You need to think about the size of the event and the potential risks involved. You can keep things simple by only publicising events locally to residents, rather than externally through websites and newspapers. If contributions are needed, ask people to bring things and give donations rather than ticketing the event, that way licenses shouldn't be necessary.

Keep music and entertainment incidental, making sure it isn't too loud and doesn't go on too late. Also, encourage everyone at the event to take responsibility for themselves and their children, the way you would at a children's party or summer fair.

## **4 The Ultimate Event Planning Checklist**

To be successful, you must have a mind for project management, and the ability to keep an eye on the little things.

Whether you are new to event marketing or an experienced pro, never underestimate the power of an event planning checklist.

### **➤ Event planning checklist**

- Determine event goals and objectives.
- Set your event budget.
- Finalize a date.
- Find a venue location.
- Create your event name and theme.
- Obtain event sponsors.
- Build your event website and registration page.
- Invite event guests.
- Promote your event.
- Secure event suppliers (catering, A/V, photographer, decorations, etc.).
- Write, proofread, and order any printed materials (programs, signage, etc.).
- Manage event day set up, execution, and tear down.
- Send post-event surveys to attendees.
- Analyze what worked versus where improvements can be made.
- Share event photos and publicity.

That is a very basic overview. We'll go through the details of those items, including an event planning timeline, in just a moment.

With so many tasks running through your mind, a checklist gives you a tangible way to ensure nothing is forgotten. This is especially helpful during the final days before your event, or when unexpected problems come up.

I highly recommend printing out the “event day toolbox” checklist, and physically checking off each item. It’s too easy to skim past an item and miss it on your computer screen. A nice little “tick” is a failsafe way to ensure you have everything you need on the event day.

The basic details on this checklist are meant to be done as soon as possible, ideally four-to-six months in advance. However, if you are starting to plan an event that is only one or two months away, it is still possible to execute a successful event! I’ve done it myself multiple times; you might just require some extra caffeine. ;)

**The checklist is broken down into the following timeline:**

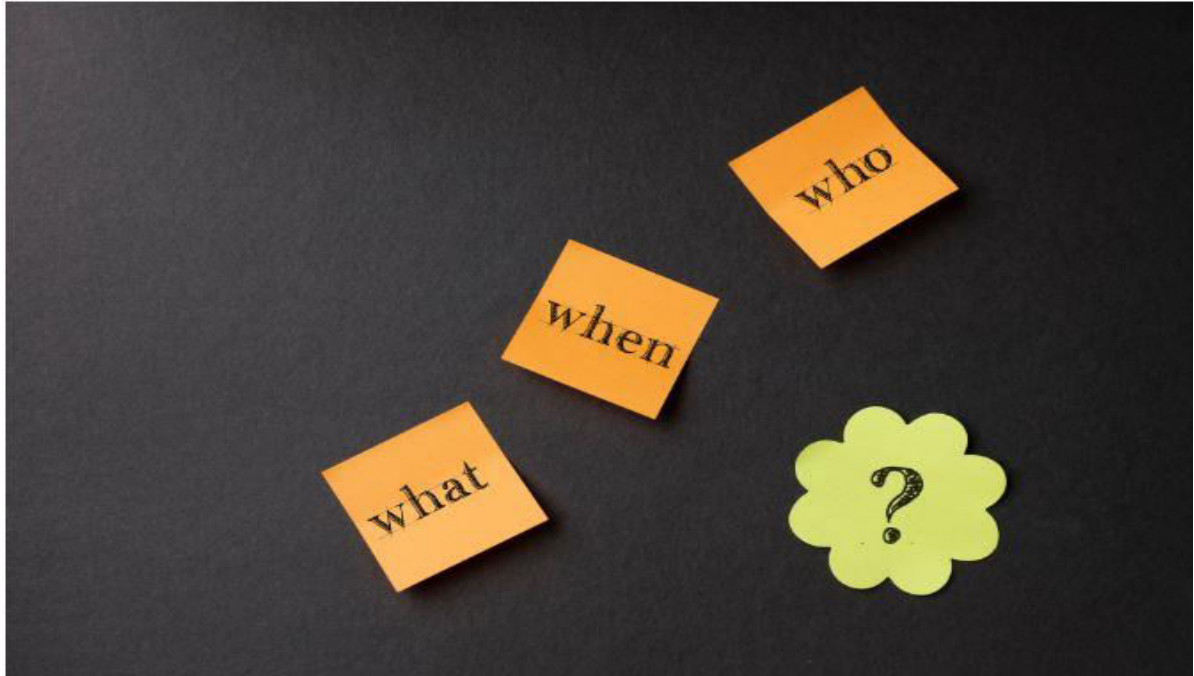
- The first steps: As soon as you begin an event marketing strategy
- Three-to-six months before the event
- One-to-three months before the event
- The month leading up to the event
- One-to-two weeks before your event
- The week leading up to the big day
- Items for your event day toolbox
- The big day itself
- Post-event action items

Use this checklist as your event planning guide, and have faith your event marketing strategy will be a success!

➤ **The first steps in your checklist: As soon as you begin planning**

These are the first actions you need to take when you are ready to plan an event. Begin by deciding on your event’s objective. What’s the goal, and what budget do you have to execute that goal?

Then, before you can create your event website or promote your event, you’ll need to have some basic details such as the date, time, and location.



The first steps to plan an event are:

- Decide your event goals.
- Determine the budget.
- Brainstorm an event theme.
- Research speakers and entertainment; reach out to those who fit your goals. This guide from BigSpeak is a great resource on how to book a celebrity speaker.
- Find event venues, research pricing, visit potential locations.
- Check for any contractual requirements – do they have a food and beverage minimum?
- Ensure venue has necessary licensing for alcohol if needed.
- Be aware of accommodations for anyone with disabilities.
- Look into parking and public transportation options.
- Set your sponsor levels and packages.
- Compile a list of potential sponsors; solidify and send your sponsor proposal.
- Lock in your event date. (Make sure there are no similar industry events on the same day!)
- Decide if you will hire an event management company to assist you.

### ➤ Three-to-six months before the event

Now that you've got the basic puzzle pieces in place, it's time to continue communicating with event partners, speakers, and sponsors. The other major steps include building your event website (so guests can register), and beginning to promote your event.



The timeline to begin this process will be affected by the size of your event. A large conference that runs for several days will have a higher cost for attendees. This means you should start promoting your event months in advance. If your event is a single-speaker session, you won't need as much lead time on your event promotion.

The steps to execute three-to-six months before your event include:

- Establish who on your team will be responsible for what.
- Outline your marketing and publicity schedule.
- Confirm speakers and entertainment, continue sourcing if needed.
- Source speaker headshots and bios for your website.
- Lock in sponsors, continue reaching out to more if needed.

- Send sponsors contracts, keep a detailed file of signed contracts and the benefits you are providing them.
- Meet with any event partners or co-hosts.
- For a large event, decide if you will use an event app. If so, begin compiling content for your app, including:
  - Sponsor logos
  - Speaker headshots and biographies
  - Surveys questions
  - Live polls during sessions
  - Event location and lodging
  - Pricing and registration
  - FAQs
  - Exhibit hall maps
- Finalize event branding and design – theme, logos, colors, etc.
- Book the event on all internal employee calendars.
- Confirm ticket fee you will charge.
- Acquire any required permits or licenses.
- Establish the agenda. Include time for:
  - Registration
  - Presentation(s) or entertainment
  - Q&A
  - Breaks
  - Networking and refreshments
- Plan the venue layout, including space for:
  - Presentations
  - Catering
  - Speaker rooms
  - Sponsor booths
  - Registration

## **Conclusion**

Community businesses are doing this at a local level but other organisations must take inspiration and share power if citizens are to fulfil their potential to take actions that positively impact on society. When those steps are missing, it doesn't work". Community businesses offer those first steps but all of us must recognise that the only way to solve societal challenges is by getting involved



ourselves and, crucially, we all have a role in creating the steps that enable others to do the same.

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