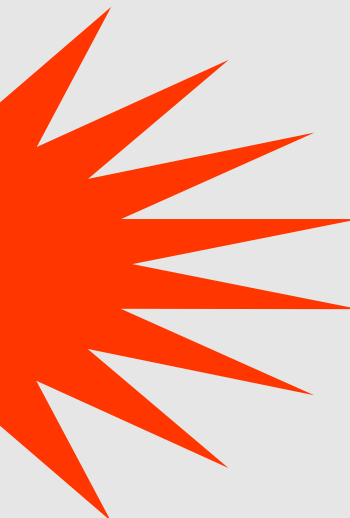


POWER TO CHANGE X COMMON VISION



10 TOP TIPS: ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY BUSINESS

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE



Community businesses are a mechanism to transform the progressive social intentions of younger generations into meaningful and sustainable community action. Yet currently only 7% of community businesses are led by 18 to 35 year olds.

In May 2022 Power to Change published 'Stories of Change' - a set of 15 case studies and a research report as part of the wider #MyCommunityBusiness campaign to bring more young people into the community business sector. These case studies profile young people's involvement with community business and identify what's working in order to enable other community businesses to develop their approaches, young people to be inspired, and Power to Change to learn how to progress youth leadership in the sector.

Drawing from the 'Stories of Change' report and case studies, Common Vision have synthesised our findings into ten top tips, designed to support existing community businesses to reach more young people, support younger community members, and develop the leadership potential of younger team members and volunteers.



10 TOP TIPS

CONNECT THROUGH VALUES

01.

Communicating and embodying intrinsic values like social justice, equity, collaboration, shared power, and care for nature is a good way to engage younger people in community business. When we speak to young people about why they got involved in community business, what inspires them or why they stay committed, it is often values like this that young people talk about. They are motivated to engage with an organisation that reflects their own ideals and principles.

In particular, for many under-35s, values of self-respect and self-help within local communities are powerful drivers. We also know that young people are three times more likely to run community businesses that reduce and recycle waste, appealing to sustainability and ecological values may engage many young people. As a community business, you could try using the language of your values actively on your social media, on your website, on posters/physical media in your space, and during welcoming talks at events.



FUTURE YARD, BIRKENHEAD

“October Books was created to be a safe space for people to express views that might not be at the forefront of everyone’s thinking. It’s a space where LGBTQ+ communities and other marginalised communities have equal rights, and it is a place where everyone feels safe and supported. That concept is still very much the driving force behind what we do.”

Jamie, 33, October Books



GET ROOTED INTO REFERRAL NETWORKS

02.

Becoming part of referral networks, university and college placement schemes, apprenticeship programmes, and volunteering networks is a way to reach more young people. A high proportion of young community business representatives we spoke with through our research first got involved in the business through a formal placement. These included: college and university placements, in which the community business was already on the list of organisations to choose from; social prescribing and health referrals from community and statutory partners; DWP and Jobcentre referrals, including Kickstart roles; and placements through national programmes, such as GroundWork's Our Bright Future.

Building these networks, and becoming known as a supportive workplace to grow in, may mean you find young people to grow with the organisation over the long-term.

MAKE IT SOCIAL

03.

Younger people are often attracted into a community business at first because of the social and community events it runs. Getting involved with an organisation can be daunting at first for many young people, especially if they don't know anyone else involved, or don't quite understand what a community business does. Therefore, hosting social events can be a bridge to deeper engagement.

Consider how you can build events and participatory activities around your work, and what events designed for under-35s might look like. This could mean partnering with young people or younger community groups to put on a film night, running a regular welcome evening for people interested in volunteering, or tasking a younger employee to design something they would want to go to.



PEOPLE DEM COLLECTIVE, MARGATE

ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE AT KEY LIFE TRANSITIONS

04.

Between the ages of 18 and 35, we go through many life transitions, from leaving education, leaving home, moving to new cities for work, and moving to raise families. All these transitions are times in which we look to build communities, re-find a sense of connection, and change our behaviour and outlook. For many young people we spoke to, it was at a point of transition when they first joined the organisation, for instance after leaving education or moving to a new town.

Community businesses could consider how they actively engage with younger people at these points of transition through their communications, outreach, and service design. For instance, developing communications which welcome new community members, those who have just moved to the city; or building referral networks with universities and schools. In terms of service design, community businesses could consider what people might need at times of transition. For example, this may be a new social network and a sense of connection, so a community business could design their services in a way which creates space and time for friendships to form.

“I was very shy then. I’m from a small town in Scotland so everyone knew each other growing up. When you move down to a place like London it’s a bit overwhelming. I think just knowing that there was this space to get to know people in a safe way, make friends, and gain experience of leading – when I didn’t think I could do anything like that – was quite special.”

Rhiannon, 28, Blackfen Community Library

PRACTICE PATIENT EMPLOYMENT

05.

Supporting younger workers, particularly those who have experienced structural barriers to employment, may mean practising patience. Community businesses could try to create environments where mistakes are met with patience and support, rather than blame, and solutions are found collaboratively.

At Platform Cafe they call this ‘patient employment’, and consciously create the space and time for younger volunteers and staff to learn through trial and error, at their own pace. When young people are treated with dignity, understood for who they are as a whole person, and met at their level, they can thrive in community business.

ENCOURAGE OWNERSHIP & RESPONSIBILITY

06.

Community businesses that successfully retain younger workers and develop their leadership often entrust them with greater responsibility and ownership for their work than a conventional business might.

Developing an active ‘learning culture’, where younger workers are encouraged to take control, learn from mistakes, and own the successes and failures helps accelerate their development and confidence growth. It also shows that you respect younger workers equally, and trust them.



GLOBAL GROOVES, MANCHESTER

NURTURE IDEAS

07.

Consider how your community business can act as a platform for younger community members to bring their ideas to life. Many young people invest most in a community business, when it also invests in their ideas for the community and explores how the organisation can help their ideas happen.

Young workers thrive when they feel empowered to develop their own passions and projects within an organisation. Younger founders of new community businesses often also need extra support from an established organisation. Consider if your community business could host or nurture fledgling initiatives through their start-up phase.



SHARE POWER AND MAKE DECISIONS TOGETHER

08.

Making your community business more diverse shouldn't just mean recruiting more young volunteers, team members, or participants, without also designing systems to share power and decision-making equitably across the organisation. This goes beyond giving young people responsibility for specific projects, or supporting them to develop their own ideas. It's about creating structures for young people, as important community representatives, to have strategic input into how the organisation runs.

Some community businesses create spaces for younger community members on their boards or senior management committees to give younger people formal representation. Others do this through more informal structures, like having young ambassadors or an advisory group, including junior team members in meetings, where strategic decisions are getting made, or delegating certain aspects of finances, operations, or strategic decision making to younger members of the organisation.

MAKE PEACE WITH CHURN

09.

Some community businesses are hesitant to invest significant resources in recruiting and engaging younger people because they are more likely to move away, or be in their roles for a short time. However, many community businesses we spoke to accepted younger people's more transient lives as a positive. First, their work gains an additional value of anchoring young people in the local area; and second, the younger people, when they move on, will bring the knowledge, values and principles of community business with them into new roles, spreading the movement. Sometimes, even if younger people move away from the area or change jobs for a time, they come back with new skills and will re-invest in the organisation, and be part of securing the legacy of the community business.



“What’s great about working with local young people is their sense of freshness and enthusiasm. [...] They aren’t looking to do this work long-term, but it’s giving them important professional skills, and part of our service to our community is giving young locals these opportunities.”

Sandra, The Thorold



IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT AGE

10.

Engaging young people shouldn't be seen in isolation, it's part of building an inclusive, intergenerational, and intersectional community around your organisation. There is so much diversity within the 18 to 35 age group that young people cannot be approached as a homogenous group. When engaging with an organisation, some younger people will specifically be looking to get a career foothold, whilst others may want to share existing professional knowledge. Sometimes being young is a strong part of someone's identity, whilst for other people, aspects of their identity will be stronger, like sexuality or ethnicity, and they will be pulled to engage with intergenerational communities of interest and identity. Developing young people's leadership in your organisation should be considered as one part of a wider community engagement, power, and development strategy.



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