**Understanding the reach and impact of your community building**

This is a short guide to help you think about how to measure the reach and impact of your community building.

This is a new resource, and we welcome feedback from organisations to make it as helpful as possible.

1. **Revisit your mission and vision**

Your vision and mission provide a high-level description of the change you want to achieve and how you will achieve that change. It is a good starting point for discussions around impact as all your organisational activities should contribute to the overall mission of your organisation. If you do not currently have an up-to-date vision and mission, you may find this [workshop activity](https://www.high-trees.org/collaboration-toolkit-visioning-activity/) a helpful tool to develop one.

1. **Who uses your building?**

It is important to have a clear idea of all the different individuals using your community building and to have simple and effective monitoring processes to record basic monitoring data.

* **Defining priority audiences and setting targets**

It is likely that there will be priority audiences that you wish to reach through your building and different activities. To refine your priority audiences, you may find it helpful to look at local statistics to understand the profile of the local area and those who may be most in need of support.

[Local Insight](https://local.communityinsight.org/) provides in-depth data for any geographic area.

The Office for National Statistics has created a number of [area profiles](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report) with data from the 2021 census. These can be used to explore data on:

* Demography
* Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion
* Work and Travel
* Housing
* Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
* Education
* Health

Depending on the nature of your local area, mission and activities, you may have a number of priority audiences. Local funders and commissioners may also have target groups they wish to reach, and it may be helpful for your organisation to be aware of these.

* **Recording demographic information**

Once you have decided on your priority audiences, you need a simple and transparent system to collect demographic data about the individuals using your community building.

Most organisations use a paper or online registration form to collect this data. It is important to be mindful of the following when using registration forms:

* **Data Protection:** It is essential that you ensure that your organisation is compliant with all data protection guidelines and legislation. In practice, this means identifying the basis on which you are processing data, having a robust [data protection policy](https://lambethhubs.com/resources/data-protection-policy-template/) and ensuring personal data is stored securely. See the [Information Commissioner’s Office](https://ico.org.uk/) for more information.
* **Consent:** you will need to explain how you store and process data and get explicit consent from everyone for you to hold their data. If you are working with young people, consent will need to be obtained from parents/ legal guardians.
* **Questions and categories:** When thinking about what questions to include on your registration form, you may find it helpful to use [questions from the national census](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/census2021paperquestionnaires) as starting point. These go through a vigorous process of [question development](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/planningforcensus2021/questiondevelopment) and are updated for every census.
* **Accessibility:** think about who is filling in your registration form and whether you need to make any adjustments to ensure it is accessible (e.g., large print, different languages).
* **Collating demographic data**
* **Uploading data**: If you are collecting data on paper registration forms, you will need to think through how this will be transferred to a spreadsheet or online database. This can be very time-consuming so you will need to be sure that you have allocated enough staff resources to do this so that you can make use of the data you are collecting.
* **Cleaning data:** you will need to look at the quality of your data and any gaps. If you are missing a lot of data, you may wish to re-think your data collection methods.
* **Reporting on demographic data**

You may need to report on your demographic data as part of regular funder reporting, reporting to trustees or as part of an annual impact report.

**Reporting against targets:** When reporting to trustees or internally looking at how well you are reaching your target audiences, you may find it helpful to report demographic data against pre-defined targets (e.g., this year 60% of those we reached were from xx wards. Our target is that 90% of our users are from xx ward).

**Visual mapping:** You may wish to create a visual map to demonstrate the reach of your community building or activities. Maps can be created using postcode data.

* <https://www.datawrapper.de/>
* <https://maply.com/>

1. **How are community members using your community building?**

|  |
| --- |
| **Activities =** things we do e.g., courses, sessions with young people, one to one employment support etc. |
| **Outputs =** a quantitative summary of an activity e.g., we delivered 25 coaching sessions. |

It may be helpful to collect data about all the ways in which individuals are using your community building. Whilst this data will not tell you explicitly about the impact of your work, it is a helpful description of how your organisational resources have been used.

For very small organisations, it may be possible to record all outputs on a spreadsheet. For larger organisations, you may wish to consider investing in an online platform. Examples include:

**Upshot -** <https://www.upshot.org.uk/>

**Lamplight -** <https://www.lamplightdb.co.uk/>

**Charity Log -** <https://www.charitylog.co.uk/>

**Views -** <https://www.viewsapp.net/>

However you record your outputs, it will need to be in a format that means it is easy to pull together all your output data for different reporting periods. A simple dashboard in excel can be a way to do this. Online platforms will have different functionality for pulling off data for different time periods. If you have different organisations using your building and wish to report on their activities, you will need to consider how this data will be captured and collated.

At the end of the year, you may wish to create a graphic showcasing all the activities that have taken place in your community building that year. These can easily be created in Canva: <https://www.canva.com/>

1. **How are community members benefitting from our community building?**

|  |
| --- |
| **Outcomes =** changes that our users experience as a result of the activity:  circumstance, behaviour, capacity, awareness, and attitude. An outcome is a finite and often measurable change e.g., young people increase self-esteem and well-being. |
| **Indicators =** evidence of change e.g., number of learners reporting learning a new skill or feeling more confident after an ESOL course |

Measuring outcomes is all about understanding what has changed for your beneficiaries as a result of engaging with your organisation and community building. Positive changes could result from:

* Individuals engaging in activities or services delivered from your community building (e.g., families learn new cooking skills from cooking workshops, young people have better well-being after mentoring sessions, migrant communities' improving their English from accessing language classes).
* Volunteers gaining new skills and experience from volunteering with your organisation.
* Community members having new access to a facility or space (e.g., a new community garden). This could mean that they are able to access activities that were previously inaccessible to them (e.g., affordable dance classes) or a space for community meetings.

Community buildings can also create benefits by providing a space where different social, age or generational groups mix, leading to high levels of trust between people in communities and can increase feelings of pride in the local area. More information on the role of community hubs in improving well-being is available [here (What works well-being 2018).](https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Places-spaces-people-wellbeing-May2018V2_0119660900.pdf)

To understand how each activity in your community building could create positive change for your target groups, you may find it helpful to develop a Theory of Change. [This resource](https://www.high-trees.org/collaboration-toolkit-developing-a-theory-of-change/) provides more guidance on how to develop a Theory of Change for your organisation.

Once you have identified all the different ways your building and organisational activities can create change, you will need to think about how you wish to measure whether that change is taking place. You may find [this resource](https://www.high-trees.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/12-HIGH-TREES-MEASURING-YOUR-IMPACT-FINAL-3.pdf) helpful to create a short impact plan for your organisation.

1. **Reflecting on impact**

It is important to create opportunities to reflect on the impact you are having. Questions to help you explore your current impact and how this can be expanded include:

* Are we reaching our priority audience?
* What positive change are we creating for our priority audience?
* Are there any unintended consequences (positive or negative) from our work?
* What do we want more of and less of?
* How can we build better services that achieve greater outcomes for local communities?
* What element of our delivery is having the most impact?