

# COMMUNITY\* LAND SCOTLAND

## Community engagement: the first stages

This resource is aimed at individuals and groups exploring the first stages of community ownership. There are specific requirements around the Scottish Land Fund and Community Right to Buy. Useful resources are also available on Community Land Scotland's website, [www.communitylandscotland.org.uk](http://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk)

Community engagement is the principle of involving local people in decision making.

If you want to buy a building or piece of land to benefit your community, involving local people from the start is essential.

Community engagement should shape every stage of your project, from researching your idea and communicating your plans to how you structure your group and take decisions. It is an essential element of the community ownership journey. How you approach community engagement impacts your project's development and the funding and other support you can access, so it is important to get it right!

Below are some questions to get you started.



### What community needs are you trying to address by purchasing land or a building?

**This is the most important question to answer. It should shape every decision you make, and your project should clearly meet the community needs you have identified.**

- \* All communities have strengths and weaknesses. It might be that you have access to brilliant outside green spaces but no inside space, limiting community activity. Owning a building could help meet this community need. Alternatively, you may have found that green space is being squeezed or there is not enough space for local businesses. Communities can purchase many different sorts of assets.

### How do you know what your community needs?

**Funders will be interested in knowing how you identified a need within your community. You may have some anecdotal evidence or have data gathered from local community plans and reports.**

- \* Your community engagement activities should help you to evidence need from a diverse range of people in your community, simply and effectively. A wide range of community engagement methods can be used at this early stage, including simple surveys and in-person community feedback sessions.

## How are you defining your community?

**More volunteer time, money, and effort will need to go into community engagement if you opt for a large area, so be realistic about what your group can take on.**



- \* You could define your community within the boundaries of an existing council ward, a small village, or even a few streets. Ultimately you are trying to find a balance between being inclusive and drawing your membership from an area that you can realistically engage with.

## Is your group democratically structured?

**Many community buyouts start with one or two individuals with a dream for their community. While a few people might initiate a project, to be truly democratic and meet the criteria of many funders, it is important that a wide range of people from your community are engaged in the management of your project.**

- \* In order to retain community control, at least half of your Steering Group, Board or Committee Members should be drawn from within the community. For constituted groups, many funders would expect this to be enshrined in your Memorandum and Articles or Model Rules.
- \* If you are not already constituted, you may want to form a Steering Group. Although having a range of skills within the group is valuable, it is also important that your group members are resilient, passionate, and are able to work together to achieve the dream of collective community ownership.



## Is your group open and inclusive?

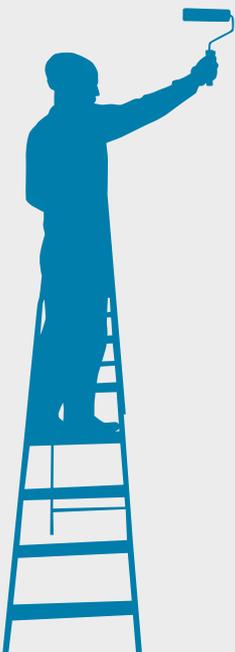
**You should consider whether your Steering Group reflects the profile and diversity of your local community.**

- \* If not, think about approaching people who could join and bring new perspectives and experiences to your group, resulting in a better understanding of community need.

## Is this the right building or piece of land to meet the needs of the community?

**A particular building or site may have sparked your group's interest in community ownership. However, it is important that the wider community supports your plans and agrees that purchasing the building or land will help address their needs.**

- \* Be prepared to be flexible and to consider a different approach, even an alternative building or piece of land, if your community engagement activities identify that this is preferable.



## Are you keeping track of all your work?

To help funders and decision-makers understand how you approached community engagement, you should document it. This information provides evidence of your community's support for the project and the level of community engagement you have achieved.

- \* Take photos of events, keep records of meetings, estimate how much time has been spent by volunteers and the number of people that attended events.

## What resources and skills do you have to carry out community engagement?

Community engagement doesn't need to cost a lot but will take time and planning. People are your most valuable resource at this stage, so think about the skills and connections they can bring to your project. Think about what kinds of event and engagement people in your community normally enjoy.

- \* You could identify people who run a local business and could promote your project. They may have time to talk to neighbours, have experience of organising events or using social media.

## How are you going to communicate with your community?

Different types of communication will suit groups within your community. Make sure you adopt a range of approaches and that they are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

- \* Think about posters, leaflets, social media, surveys, local radio, newspapers and newsletters. Consider where your community meets. For example, shops, pubs, village halls, religious buildings, schools and parks. Could producing material in different languages and formats help?
- \* Could you run events such as coffee mornings, music nights or information days that attract people along? Can you piggyback on other organisations' events? Are there people who would struggle to attend events? Can you work with other community and voluntary organisations to reach people who might be stuck at home or in residential care? Can you work with local schools to engage young people?
- \* You shouldn't just communicate once. The more information that you can put out, the more buy-in you are likely to get. For example, could you put a regular 'Frequently Asked Questions' update on your social media or website? Would your local newspaper run regular reports? It can be nerve-wracking putting your plans out in the open, but our experience at Community Land Scotland is that the communities that put out the most information and seek to be inclusive have the highest chances of success.
- \* When running events, it can sometimes be useful to bring in a speaker from Community Land Scotland or another community landowner to give an external perspective on what it is like to be a community landowner.



## How will you handle criticism?

**It is best to be as open as possible about your plans at this stage and to learn from positive and negative feedback.**

- \* Listen to what people are trying to tell you. Critical feedback will help you identify weaknesses in your project, so listen to concerns, learn from the comments, and see what you can do to address them. However, if you feel that there is a groundswell of opinion against your plans, you will have to decide whether community ownership is the right way forward.

## How are you going to look after your team?

**Buying a community asset can be fun and exciting, but it can also be challenging and time-consuming.**

- \* Celebrate the 'wins', however small, and try to support each other by giving praise and showing appreciation for everyone's contributions.

**If you don't have all the answers, don't worry! If the community ownership model is new to your community and people find the idea daunting, Community Land Scotland are here to help. We can provide some great examples of community engagement and practical advice about each stage of the community ownership journey through our network of members.**

## Contact us

info@communitylandscotland.org.uk  
www.communitylandscotland.org.uk  
07884 314297

 @CommunityLandScotland  
 @CommunityLandSc

Community Land Scotland  
Fearann Coimhearsnachd na h-alba is a charity registered in Scotland SC041864 Company Number 385572.  
Published June 2021

