

A photograph of a community garden scene. In the foreground, a person's arm in a blue long-sleeved shirt is visible, holding a green-handled tool and working on a plant. In the background, a woman with red hair in a bun and sunglasses is planting yellow flowers. The garden is filled with various potted plants, including yellow and pink flowers. The background shows a brick wall and a window with vines. An orange triangle is overlaid on the left side of the image, and a red triangle is in the bottom right corner.

2021 COMMUNITY ACTION PLAYBOOK

01

From one community, to another...

We have such **power as individuals**. That power becomes limitless, when we come together.

History has shown us the sheer impact that movements have had on our society, from the suffragettes to Black Lives Matter. These people, with a shared vision, interest and passion – are a community. A group of like-minded individuals who want to push for a better world – for themselves; for their communities, for their places and their planet.

The **Community Action Collective** was formed to support this movement for a better world. Organisations working with, through and for communities across the UK, have come together to create a community of their own. We wanted to explore how our collective skills, expertise, and networks might be utilised, in an inclusive and accessible way, to support communities to unleash their power and potential through actions that are good for people, place and planet.

**We are the Community Action Collective – we stand beside communities.
We hope this Playbook helps.**



Back in early 2021 a group of representatives from organisations, big and small and from across sectors assembled.

We began by asking ourselves one big question:

How might we work together to help communities unleash their power to act for people and the planet?

What was clear was that there was no one-stop-shop for all the learnings, experiences and stories of what had been tried and tested in this field. The recommendation was to firstly pull together a co-designed '**Community Action Playbook**'.



Why a 'Playbook'?

A playbook is a 'book containing a team's strategies and plays'. The ambition is that our playbook will be the go-to-guide for anyone working with communities, designed by not one organisation but mining a wealth of experience from people already doing splendid work. Here is another similar example with the [Impact Guide](#), designed by many for the greater good.

We were conscious early on that we wanted to embrace the ethos of 'There is no such thing as a new idea'. We were very aware that we did not want to reinvent the wheel, so we are embracing the 'steal with pride' approach as outlined by Austin Kleon in [Steal like an artist](#).

Who is the Playbook for?

Any organisation who is working with and for communities where they may want to take relevant action for the nature and climate emergency.

Whose Playbook is this?

With contributions from across the community action collective group of organisations, we need to feel as though all collaborators have ownership over this playbook and that we can all have our stories heard.



Over several months, with the pandemic whipping up around us, we ran sessions laying down what would be included in the playbook:



Guiding Themes

More overarching ways of empowering communities



Practical Tips

Bite size chunks of advice that you can pick and choose from



Stories of Action

Real stories from people who have used these practical tips



Guiding Themes





Participation from day one

Work with communities to check your assumptions, get the low down and build your work together. This will build confidence, trust and keep the energy and momentum going.

Start with what is strong not what is wrong

Start with where the energy is at!

Supply proof of concept through ongoing reflection

Evaluation and learning as we go.

Be visible – transparency and honesty is key

Knowing when to let go and let others shine. Being conscious of the image you are being visible with – and what that means to people.

Community from the start

Giving communities the tools they need to create sustainable, community-led work.

Meet people where they are

People may be interested in other primary motivators, other than benefits to nature and climate. Inclusion is key and approachability is the first step! Sometimes it is intimidating to contribute, so work with people where they feel comfortable, in a way relevant to them.

Support one another

Low capacity means often saying ‘No’. Showcasing others work may mean a more sustainable way of working so they can follow up. Feeling more supported throughout the journey.

Inclusivity – being part of the movement – for anyone!

Ensuring inclusivity is there throughout the process. Valuing and recognising diversity and input from others. Be conscious of who isn’t in the group and look at how you can include them.

Accessibility

Recognise barriers to participation for diverse groups e.g., accessibility needs, transport and times of day.

Legacy and leadership

Find those key individuals that can lead and empower their own community to ensure action and impact is sustainable. Ensure to also follow up to support the legacy and do the things you say you will do.





Practical Tips



We have searched far and wide to come up with a series of top tips and practical advice about how to help communities unlock their power and take relevant action for them. Use this document to find something that you can start doing today...



Practical Tips

09

1. Collective vision

This takes time and can take a full day of painfully going over words, one by one. A vision allows you to understand your direction of travel and a way of inspiring your team around a common cause. By designing the vision together, you will get buy-in from everyone. If one person squirrels themselves away and designs the vision for the team, even if it is quicker, it will probably be worthless.

2. Know your gifts

In the past when a person had a need they went to their neighbourhood for help. Just think of the good old cup of sugar request. But this has shifted to people believing that they get what they need from the authorities, businesses and services. This leads to the belief that power has been taken away from communities. But by taking this back to what gifts we all have to share this shifts the power

dynamic, enabling us to release our power. See [Asset Based Community Development](#) (Nurture Development team).

3. Plan and adapt

Being flexible is key, especially when you do not know your outputs from the beginning. Even a simple plan will help give you focus. You can also share this plan with others so they can understand what you are trying to achieve and how you want to reach your vision. Keep your plan live and regularly go back to it to see if you are on track or if you need to make changes. Change is the only constant – so your plan probably should change over time. Testing your idea and trying out prototypes will save you a lot of time and give you invaluable feedback.

4. Measure

After setting out your vision and prioritised actions it will be important to understand

how you measure whether you have achieved these goals. Sometimes this may be difficult, and you may be able to use a proxy indicator of success. You will find it is a balance between monitoring whether you are on the right track or turning your evaluation method into a full-on industry. See Heritage Insider's Evaluation Trumps on the [Greedy Squirrel website](#).

5. Prioritised action

Funnel resources into where it can have most impact. You may have a lot of energy to crack on and get stuff done. Taking action is key. Do! However, take yourself back to your vision and goals – certain action will deliver your vision a lot quicker. So, prioritise your actions. You can't be everything to everyone. Clearly identifying the scope, the area, of your project will help you when opportunities arise, and you will then know whether those opportunities help you deliver





your goals. When in doubt keep it simple with these following six questions:

- Who are my people?
- What change do they need?
- What is our strategic goal?
- What is our theory of change?
- What are our tactics?
- What is our timeline and budget?

6. Legal and risk

Do not put yourself or others in danger. Are you a rule-breaker, rule-keeper or rule-maker? Your tribe may have a mix of people, and this can cause conflict. A simple rule to live by is, be safe and stay legal. This means doing some research about what you can and cannot do. If unsure, then ask someone who may know or has experience doing a similar project. You will be surprised what policy documents and agreements you may need to sort out. These may include safeguarding, privacy, equality,

land-use, copyright and local legislation to name a few.

7. Tool up!

Mapping out your gifts that people are happy to share and then understanding what the gaps are will help you focus your efforts on what you then need to achieve your prioritised actions. These may be items like leaf rakes and trowels, skills such as social media and volunteer recruitment and then space to hold events, meet as a group or even carry out your actions for nature. Beg, borrow (but don't steal) and ask others who may have these tools already. Sharing is caring!

8. Money matters

Ensuring your project is sustainable and has a legacy that means it can continue for as long as is needed – may require resources. However, it is amazing how much can be done on a shoestring.

Although do not fall into the trap of limiting the scale of your vision by limited budgets. Set your achievable vision and then understand the ongoing costs. There is a sizeable number of funding and sponsorship opportunities, you just need someone who loves filling in forms and selling your story. Look for small grants for grassroot groups e.g. Groundwork administers [community grant funds](#) on behalf of Tesco and Comic Relief, as well as a range of other [small or local grant funds](#). For fundraising, there's a new tool [ActionFunder.org](#).

9. Dynamic dynamos

Be in the spaces where people are and where the action is happening e.g., if you want to work with young people – go to schools/colleges/universities to create connections. You may have 100 people on your email distribution list and 25 regular people turning





up to your work party days but most of the time there are a few dynamic individuals that keep the energy up and make progress happen. These are your “Community Organisers”. They reach out and listen, connect and motivate people to build their collective power. The trick is making sure they don’t burn out and planning in for their succession when it is their turn to move on.

10. Partners and allies

Connect nature with other, relatable motivators to increase diversity. Start conversations and use existing networks. There will be people who are against what you are doing or pessimistic views that say it is not worth you doing anything. You need good people by your side to support you. Having groups who have already been on a similar journey or can offer you advice will be very

comforting. After identifying your gifts, you can find who can help you. These may be financial partners, political partners, expert partners or any influencers who can help you get the job done.

11. Ask questions and listen

Be aware that bringing people into traditional structures won’t solve the problem. Take time to talk and listen – don’t underestimate how long this takes! Listen to neighbours, listen to colleagues and experts, even if you too may be considered an expert. The insight you will gain will be invaluable and help you to be more impactful. Sometimes you will learn facts and figures and other times, rich stories from the past and present. We all have a story to tell. Practise listening. It is also perceived as a great trait to have, by the communities themselves (and funders).

12. Find your tribe

It may be about how to get new participants, finding gate holders who may only have one perspective, or engaging younger audiences. There are a lot of people out there who may not be interested to begin with. So best bet is finding the people who are interested. You will have a more powerful voice when there are more of you. You can do this by putting up posters, contacting groups on social media or even just talk to people at the school pick-up, in the pub or local café. Ask yourself what would tempt people to come out and meet you? Cake helps!

13. Motivate others!

Yes, you could boss people around and tell them to do what you want but that is not really the spirit of community. Yes, we need leaders, and some people are better at doing this





than others. What we can all do is motivate others to act. We can do this through leveraging positive emotions, make things personal (in a positive way) and sometimes incentives do also help. To do this you will have to talk to people and take time to listen and understand their perspective.

14. Be social

Because socialising is important to people! Whether you are a hermit, an introvert or a social butterfly, bringing people together either online or face to face can be unbelievably valuable. Community cohesion, or lack of it, is often cited as an important factor when working with communities. It will often help overcome any conflicts by understanding that we are all human with different outlooks on life. We are social beasts and care about our reputations and are influenced by the behaviour of others. Visible action can help harness reciprocity and public

commitment to the cause. Being social can be a lot more fun too. Creative activities e.g., storytelling, can encourage people to share so that you might capture what's important to them. Make it Easy, Attractive, Social, Timely ([EAST model](#)) and culturally relevant e.g., food, eating, cooking and growing such as the Eden Project Communities Big Lunch.

15. Celebrate

Most people you will be working with in your community will be giving up their time and resources for the greater good. This is not a job and so best not be so much of a taskmaster that people leave. Celebrate successes, this shows that you care as a group and know that each milestone has been achieved and you are on the right path to reaching your goals and vision. How to celebrate? That is up to you, but we do find that cake (again) and music helps!

16. Clever communications

Use creatives in engagement. Be clear on language use and framing e.g., what do we mean by 'empowerment'. Keep your messaging simple and relevant to your goals. The way you frame your messaging to your target audience needs to resonate with their values, identities and interests. See the [Framing Nature Toolkit](#) for more ideas. Then you need to decide on the right messenger, the right people, right channels and right time that will mean your messages rise above all the other noise. Then keep at it, you may get bored delivering your messages but only at that moment will they start getting through to your audience.





A Good Read

Suggested resources from collaborators

From our research earlier in the year we found some notable examples of practical advice for organisations who want to empower communities:

- The National Lottery [Community Planning Toolkit](#)
- [Resource Centre in Brighton](#)
- Eden Project Communities [Tools](#)
- Community Organisers [Principles of Practise and Framework](#)
- [New Power by Jeremy Heimans & Henry Timms](#)
- [My Community](#) All the latest tools, tips and ideas to make your community an even better place to live.





Stories of Action





The last piece of the puzzle that came through loud and clear was the need for practical examples of where this has happened – from real people, not just the theory.

You only have to look at examples such as the [Humans of New York](#) to see how people's own stories really resonate.

- [Community Organisers Social Action Hubs](#)
- [Transition Network](#)
- [Garden Alley in Belfast](#)
- WWT (Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust) [Urban Wetlands](#)
- [Evanton Wood Community](#)
- [Window Wanderland](#)
- [Co-Farm, Cambridge](#)
- [Bunker Housing Co-op, Brighton](#)
A group of low-income families building their own, sustainable, locally-sourced housing.
- [Our Bright Future](#)
A community-led campaign with a focus on youth.
- [Brighton & Hove Food Partnership](#)
Food growing, food habits, behaviour change, food learning and sustainability.
- [Incredible Edible Network](#)
Their vision is to create kind, confident and connected communities through the power of food.
- [Old Tree](#)
The small team behind Old Tree Brewery, but a big community behind many of the Old Tree initiatives that focus on community gardening, forest gardens, 'Compost Club' and more.
- [Backbone Nature days](#)
Ethnic minority groups changing themselves as a service industry.
- [Semble](#)
Here you can find more stories of action.



If you would like to share your story, then please do get in touch.

Carry on the conversation by using #communityaction in your posts or give Emma and Adam a shout at community@rspb.org.uk.

We can then pass you on to the relevant people in the Collective.