Practical Steps To Community Engagement During Lockdown

This guide offers ideas on how to both reach out to community members during lockdown, and on how to connect with others who are socially organising during lockdown, such as your local Covid Mutual Aid Group or other community organisations. We recommend working to build trust with those you reach out to above all else and being an active listener (see this active listening guide for further information).

Whilst you might wish to discuss the Trust the People community democracy project and to promote grassroots democracy, timing these discussions is very important – if they are done too soon, people might feel that you are trying to push an agenda, and you might subsequently alienate them.

Reaching Out to Members of Your Community

Where Do Community Members Interact?

The first question to ask is: where do community members interact? Here are some ideas about where you can reach members of your community:

- Facebook or other social media platforms community pages
- Parish and town websites, online mag's and local newspapers
- Nextdoor.com
- Look on council websites for local offerings
- Community noticeboard in a supermarket, post office etc.
- Mutual aid and community support groups
- On the streets - posters, flyers, stickers

Be sure to reach out to those who may traditionally be forgotten about - the more vulnerable and isolated cohorts of your community. Focus on identifying 'less visible' demographics and on what the points of contact might be e.g. homeless charities, 'Refugee's welcome', Youth Workers, etc. Ask those actively engaged in these organisations for input on how to engage with the communities they are involved in.

Practical Means of Reaching Out

Once you know where the people you want to reach are, consider the ways to reach out to them. Here are some suggestions:

- Leaflets and flyers in letterboxes:

  1. Use safety protocols - Queercare's are very thorough.

  2. See pre-designed flyers for reaching out during Covid-19 here.

  3. See pre-designed flyers for publicising a Community Assembly here and here.

- Posters in community noticeboards, supermarkets, food banks or any other identified areas for reaching people. Take notice, as you move through the local area, of where things are routinely advertised and what catches your eye, and replicate the approaches you see.

- Online events such as games nights, neighbourhood cups of tea and/or listening circles.

- Setting up a community engagement facebook page or forum to organise online events.

- Finding existing facebook groups / pages and advertising your online events/assemblies there.

- Create new content: consider making 'info' videos or podcasts on what you are doing, blogs by those involved, and/or mini 'testify' videos that to be shared on social media.

When you are reaching out initially, make an effort to build trust and connections. Spend time getting to know people in your community.

Reaching Out to Organisations in Your Community

When communicating with other groups, especially groups who have been doing really fantastic work such as Mutual Aid, it's important to make sure we are communicating effectively, but that we enter these spaces in a spirit of service and humility. Listen to those you encounter and work to build trust before you begin discussing community democracy.

Making Contact

- Check to see if you know anyone who is already involved with your local Covid Mutual Aid group or whichever community organisation you are reaching out to.
- Think about asking your neighbours, or people in your local XR group. If you know others who are in contact or have personal connections, then it's good to start there.
- Inform those members that you would like to offer a talk on a new Community Democracy project called Trust the People, which wants to support the growth of grassroots democracy in the UK. It is important to explain that Trust the People has been created by people in Extinction Rebellion's Future Democracy Hub, so they understand who is working on this project. But equally explain that others outside of the movement are working on the project too.

- If you don't know anybody who is involved with your local Covid Mutual aid group then you can find your local mutual aid group on their website. From there, if one exists, you'll be prompted to join the relevant Facebook pages and/or Whatsapp group, and then you will be in direct contact with those you would like to speak to. If one doesn't exist, then why not start one?
- Equally, if you don't know of anyone personally involved with community organising groups in your area, then consider starting a local community democracy group using the steps outlined in the Reaching Out to Members of Your Community section at the start of this document.

Useful Resources

- Covid Community Organising Guide
- Covid Mutual Aid Resources