

Resources for Reaching Out to Others in Your Community

Deep Hanging Out

The point of this guide is to frame an attitude to engaging different communities, impart confidence and share important skills, but this is not a roadmap. This work needs to be authentically connected to the people who undertake it. There are no cheats or shortcuts. To do it well will mean honestly interrogating your assumptions and overcoming fears. Sit with yourself and ask, given my interests, what could I do in my area? Am I comfortable with longer deeper chats? Is door-knocking more my thing?

It's important not to spend too much time debating the strengths and weaknesses of an approach. None of us are experts, get out there, start trying things!

What is Deep Hanging-Out?

Originally a tool in Anthropology developed by Clifford Geertz, meaning to “immerse oneself in a cultural, group or social experience on an informal level”. We’re repurposing the idea.

Why does it matter that we do it?

Deep Hanging-out helps us form a deeper understanding of an area. It helps us to break down assumptions that we hold consciously or unconsciously. It also makes us a more closely connected member of a community, a vital thing for people to trust you.

Importantly, no community is a blank slate needing to be filled with any one understanding of community and/or democracy. Places are filled with formal and informal relationships between individuals, groups and organisations. Understanding these will help determine the role you might be able to play and how to support a community’s democratic culture without needing to reinvent the wheel. Consider the permaculture principle of causing the *least change for greatest effect*.

Who should we be hanging out with?

Usual suspects: us

Look for people who have been constructing a new system of operation for a while. Civil society, social enterprise, volunteer networks. See this list for national organisations who may have local chapters. Find out what their area of work is, what problem are they trying to solve?

Try to connect with members of these organisations in person. They will be able to explain a thorough picture of the other similar institutions in the area and save you a lot of time.

Excluded people who share our values

These are people who are open to ideas of pro-democracy and pro-community but aren't otherwise engaged. Find out what the barriers are for these people becoming more involved?

People who don't share our values

These are people who are excluded and don't share your values. Why have they been excluded? What are the differences between their worldview and yours? What common ground do you share?

How do we do it?

You can think of the possibilities for Deep Hanging-out in two ways: (1) joining conversations (2) starting conversations.

1. Joining conversations

Before inviting people to meet you, go to where people are. Where in the community are people already interacting with each other? Think of places like cafés, the post office, schools, faith centres or the barber shop. Break out of your comfort zone and go to these places. Listen, observe and make friends.

Listening is a skill in itself, rarely cultivated in mainstream society. Practicing listening means really hearing what people are saying and rejecting the instinct to assume. Active listening is a practice to help us do this.

Active listening means overcoming the urge to judge, analyse, diagnose, question what someone else is saying whilst they're speaking. It means, instead of thinking about your response, pay close attention and be present to what someone is saying. Reflecting back the essence of what you're hearing to the person speaking proves you're listening and helps build trust.

Real learning, authentic relating and actual understanding of others requires space for slower conversations. These are spaces where people have the time to build real relationships and are more likely to share their interests, anxieties and ambitions.

Don't rush your attempt to learn about your community and any person within it.

2. Starting conversations

The community assembly is a fast-paced, transformative way to learn about a communities' needs, but there are other slower forms of conversation that need to be had too. These other spaces are not 'focus groups' to inform your community building project, but part of the community building itself. All of these conversations will involve mutual learning, but they will also build trust.

Part of the feminisation of politics is creating spaces for discussions that are not competitive or ego-driven. In practice this could mean bringing in the arts, food and friendliness to a conversation. This might be a community feast, a games club or a conversation cafe.

These spaces need to be co-created by the new attendees who visit them. Ask them to edit the invitation (flyer, poster etc) in terms that would appeal to them more. Invite them to host their own gathering or join you in hosting one.

Many of those excluded from community conversations are people unable to attend events in the daytime or unlikely to visit public places. One way to try to reach these people is going door-to-door knocking. If done well, this method of engagement also allows for longer, more intimate conversations. See here for guidance on [listening on the doorstep](#).

Who isn't here?

Always ask who is not yet in your field of vision. Are there people you are unconsciously ignoring or afraid of?

Some examples

- The talkshop
 - [The empathy circle](#)
 - Sports event
 - Community Feast
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