



The Neighbourhoods Project

9. COMMUNICATING with your neighbourhood

One of the keys to building a connected, supported and informed neighbourhood, is having an effective way to communicate with each other both in good times and bad. You may choose to communicate at a neighbourhood level and/or at pod level.

Some neighbourhoods may want a number of communication channels that may include:

1. Email – by setting up a database of community members and emailing them as a group. An alternative is groupsio. Groups.io provides an invitation system for coordinators (with the right permissions) to submit the email addresses of people they want to invite to join the group. The system sends an email invitation to each person. To join the group, each recipient just has to click on the link in the invitation or reply to the invitation. Coordinators can track each invitation and see whether it has been accepted. For more info on Groupsio go to <https://groups.io/>

There are several benefits to using an email group as compared to say an online forum, including:

1. Familiarity: Email is a more familiar technology, which can make it easier for members to participate in the community. Many people are comfortable using email, and are more likely to engage with an email group than an online forum.
 2. Convenience: Email groups can be more convenient than online forums, as members can receive notifications and updates directly in their inbox. They can also reply to messages directly without having to log in to a separate website or platform.
 3. Privacy: Email groups can be more private than online forums, as messages are only visible to members of the group. This can be important for sensitive or confidential discussions, or for communities that value privacy and security.
 4. Better Engagement: Email groups can encourage better engagement among members, as messages are more likely to be seen and read than posts on an online forum. This can lead to more active discussions and a stronger sense of community.
 5. No Need for constant Internet Access: Email groups don't require constant internet access to participate, which can be a benefit for members with limited or unreliable internet connections.
 6. No Learning Curve: Email groups don't require members to learn new software or platforms, which can be a benefit for members who are less tech-savvy.
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2. UHF Radios – for times when mobile reception and internet is down and especially during emergencies, battery operated UHF radios are an effective way to communicate within neighbourhoods. RUKI has a radio coordinator Bernd Langer who is working on setting up an effective UHF radio network with protocols and guidelines. For more information Bernd can be contacted on 0418428877 or at vk2ia@vkcc.net
 3. Online forum/ messenger platform – an online platform can be better for building a sense of community among members, as they offer more opportunities for members to interact and collaborate with each other. However, setting up an online community from scratch requires some work. To help you get started, here is a list of ten tips for setting up an online community.



1. Define Your Community's Purpose

Before you start building your online community, you need to define its purpose. What do you want to achieve by building this online community? Having a clear purpose will help you to moderate your online community.

Within the context of The Neighbourhoods Project, the purpose of an online community might be to:

- Provide a platform for neighbourhood members to be able to talk to each other about things that relate to the safety, support and resilience of the neighbourhood e.g.
 - o Share updates regarding weather events, road blocks, lost pets, burn offs e.t.c.
 - o Provide information about activities, events and opportunities for capacity building,
 - o Put out and respond to calls for help

Some neighbourhoods may choose to set up two messenger groups. One may have a focus on emergency and disaster communication. The other may be more for community information sharing during 'peace time'.

2. Choose Your Platform

Once you've defined your community's purpose, it's time to choose a platform to host your community. There are many options. While some apps cost \$ and are technically more complex, there are 2 options that many people are familiar with and are free i.e. Facebook Groups and What's App. Here are some pros and cons for using the two platforms.

a. Facebook Groups

Pros: easy to set up and use; wide audience reach; integrates with other Facebook features like Events and Pages; robust moderation tools

Cons: dependence on Facebook's algorithm; potential for privacy concerns; can be difficult to keep discussions organized; limited customization options

NB Some people don't want to join a messenger group because they think they have to be active on FB to do so. This is not the case.

"You'll need to create a Facebook account to use Messenger. You can then deactivate your Facebook account and log into Messenger using your Facebook account information. This is called a Deactivated Except Messenger Account (DEMA).

- When you have a DEMA:
- You can still chat with friends on Messenger.
- Your picture will only be visible in your conversations on Messenger.
- Other people can search for you in Messenger and send you a message.



- You won't be searchable on Facebook.
- You'll have a deactivated Facebook profile that you can activate at any time. You'll need to confirm your birthday and may be asked to create a password for account security.

For more information, go to <https://m.facebook.com/help/messenger-app/117818065545664>

b. WhatsApp

Pros: wide audience reach, with over 2 billion active users worldwide; easy to set up and use; good for real-time communication; allows for group chats with up to 256 members; supports multimedia content, including photos, videos, and voice messages; end-to-end encryption for added security; available on both mobile and desktop devices

Cons: difficult to keep discussions organized; limited customization options; lacks moderation tools; can be overwhelming for new users; dependence on phone numbers, which can raise privacy concerns; limited to mobile devices, with limited functionality on desktop

3. Create Community Guidelines

Setting simple, clear community guidelines is essential to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Your guidelines should include the community's purpose, the type of content that's allowed, and what behaviour is acceptable. Make sure to enforce your guidelines to maintain a positive and safe community environment.

Here's a two sample Codes of Conduct for an online community:

Sample One

1. **Respect Others:** Treat all members of the community with respect and kindness, regardless of their background, identity, or beliefs. Do not engage in hate speech, discrimination, or harassment of any kind.
2. **No Trolling or Spamming:** Do not post irrelevant, repetitive, or offensive content. Do not engage in trolling or flame wars, or post inflammatory comments intended to provoke others.
3. **No Illegal Activity:** Do not engage in any illegal activity or post content that violates the law. This includes posting copyrighted material, engaging in piracy, or promoting illegal drugs or activities.
4. **Keep It Safe:** Do not post anything that could compromise the safety or privacy of community members. Do not share personal information, or engage in behaviour that could be harmful or threatening to others.
5. **Use Common Sense:** Use common sense and good judgment when posting content or engaging with others. Be mindful of the impact your actions may have on the community and its members.



6. Moderation: Follow the instructions of the community moderators, and report any inappropriate behaviour or content to them. Do not engage in behaviour that violates the community's rules, or that could harm the community or its members.
7. Accountability: Take responsibility for your actions and their impact on the community. If you make a mistake, apologize and make amends. If you are called out for inappropriate behavior, listen to the concerns of others and work to make things right.

Sample Two

Please do:

- Share information about weather events, disasters, lost pets, burn offs, preparation ideas..
- Provide information about opportunities for capacity building, activities and events
- Put out and respond to calls for help
- Engage in friendly discussion or debate about the topic of the post.
- Keep comments brief and to the point.
- Flag inappropriate comments, by e-mailing

Please do not:

- Attack other commenters.
- Use profanity.
- Use language that is libelous, defamatory, obscene, threatening, offensive, demeaning, derogatory, disparaging, or abusive, or post links to content that contains any of this language.
- Degrade others on the basis of gender, race, class, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual preference, disability, or other classification.
- Make remarks that are off-topic.
- Write lengthy comments beyond the scope of the original post.
- Post spam.
- Post commercial messages.

Remember that these are just sample Codes of Conduct, and may need to be customized to fit the specific needs of your neighbourhood. It should be clearly communicated to all members of the online community, and regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains effective and relevant.

4. Recruit Members

To build a thriving online community, you need members. Start by inviting the people who have completed the survey at your neighbourhood gathering and indicated an interest in being included. You may need to follow up by inviting other members of your neighbourhood to join. You could do this through asking existing members to invite friends and neighbours, or through a letter box drop, or a door knocking exercise.

5. Encourage Engagement



Engagement is the key to a successful online community. Encourage your members to participate in discussions, share their thoughts and ideas, and provide feedback. Ask questions, run polls, and create challenges to keep your members engaged.

6. Foster Relationships

Building relationships within your community is crucial for creating a sense of belonging and community spirit. Encourage your members to connect with each other and participate in group activities. Create opportunities for members to collaborate on projects and initiatives.

7. Provide Value

Offering value to your community is essential for building trust and credibility. Provide your members with valuable resources, educational content, and exclusive benefits. This will incentivize your members to stay active and engaged. NB Some of this may be provided through The Neighbourhoods Project.

8. Listen to Feedback

Listening to your community's feedback is critical for improving your community and keeping your members happy. Use surveys, feedback forms, and focus groups to gather feedback and insights from your members. Use this feedback to make changes and improvements to your community.

9. Moderate Effectively

Moderation is crucial to maintain a positive and safe community environment. Assign moderators to monitor the community and ensure that members are adhering to the code of conduct. Moderators should have clear guidelines for when and how to take action in response to inappropriate behaviour, gently enforcing the community guidelines while not being a 'dictator'.

Develop a protocol for addressing conflicts within the community, such as mediation or arbitration. Make sure that all members are aware of the conflict resolution process and have access to it if needed.

10. Stay Consistent

Finally, consistency is key to building a successful online community. Post regular updates, create a content calendar, and maintain an active presence. Consistency will help you build trust and credibility with your members and keep them engaged.

In conclusion, setting up an online community requires time, effort, and dedication. However, with the right strategy and approach, you can build a thriving community that adds value to your neighbourhood. Use these tips to get started and create a community that fosters engagement, collaboration, and relationships.