



Stroud Common Wealth Community Farm Land Trust Project

Briefing Paper

Guidelines for Community Engagement – Top Tips from Fordhall Farm

*Successful community engagement is achieved through **communication, involvement and recognition**. If you are achieving these then engagement will naturally follow. The methods you use to achieve this will vary with each situation. There can not be one set of methods, but all methods applied must satisfy the main concepts.*

COMMUNICATION

1. Be open and honest with all affairs
2. Tell the story as often and in as many places as possible
3. Let people feel as if they really know you. They want to know the detail as well as the big issues. They want to know the bad as well as the good.
4. The frequency of communication will differ for each situation. People do not want to be bombarded but want to be able to access information when they want it.
5. Use a wide variety of media to get to as many people as possible e.g. email, websites, blogs, local press, local radio, posters, leaflets, newsletters.
6. The way you communicate also has a very important part to play. We have found that being pushy can often have a negative effect. You need to somehow explain the issue or dilemma (if there is one) without implying that people must help you, or should be obliged to be involved. You simply need to offer people the opportunity to be involved.
7. Whenever you are communicating a negative issue or point always end the communication on a positive.
8. If you have methods of communication which can be replied to these are even better. Encourage people to respond to newsletters or to post comments on your website. This allows people to feel involved and part of the project. Even if people do not respond, simply knowing that they can opens up your ability to communicate and engage people.

INVOLVEMENT

1. Provide people with the opportunity to be involved wherever possible. Make these activities fun and different. Volunteering is a great way of involving people, giving them a sense of ownership of a project and getting some important jobs done at the same time. Volunteers are an integral part of Fordhall's success. They have been part of Fordhall from the very beginning, their work has improved the farm and allowed it to grow and progress. They can see the benefits of their work each time they visit the farm and this feeling of ownership is a vital ingredient in engaging communities.
2. It is important to recognise the value of those who can not get involved directly on the farm, but may be able to help in other ways. Perhaps they could write something for the newsletter, offer advice, contacts, donate, paint the farm or even provide you with a recipe for your cook book to help raise funds.
3. We hold regular volunteer weekends at the farm and we try to involve people in as many activities as possible. Our next major project for example, is to build carbon neutral buildings for a tea rooms and educational bunk house. We are allowing our supporters the opportunity to get involved with this process from the planning stages to the actual building stages. This will make the building their own. Not only will it be more fun to erect, but by engaging people in its construction, they will be more inclined to use it and encourage others to use it.
4. Not every one of your supporters will get actively involved with the farm. Your community for example may not all be local. BUT, the most important thing is that they feel able and welcome to be involved.
5. It is also important to remember that involvement is encouraged through evidence of your own hard work. If others see the time and effort you are putting into your own project then they will be more willing to do the same. If you are lazy or dis-interested then you will not engage people or enthuse them to volunteer. YOUR enthusiasm is one of your most priceless assets; don't underestimate it.

RECOGNITION AND RESPECT

1. The hardest part of engaging communities is keeping that engagement and interest once you have it. We have found that an important part of this continued interest is recognition.
2. Your supporters are interested in what you are doing, but they need to feel that their interest and support is valued and is making a difference. People generally volunteer or support projects because they believe in them and they want that warm feel-good feeling in their gut that they have contributed to worthwhile project.
3. Volunteers and not-for-profit shareholders at Fordhall have made the impossible, possible and we could not be more thankful for their support. We have tried in as many ways as possible to show our supporters just how vital and important they are to our future activities just as much as our past achievements. In our recent newsletter for example we sent out a dried Oak Leaf from our first secure Autumn at Fordhall farm. This did two things. It allowed every person to have their own piece of the farm they helped to save at Christmas time; and by us putting the time into collecting the leaves and pressing them, it demonstrated our thanks for the time that so many others have given to us over the year.
4. Other methods of recognition may be by offering supporters free or concessionary tickets at events. Recognition can come in many different forms. It is important to think of your supporters in everything you do. After all, you would not be here without them.
5. The more you give to your community, the more they will give you in return. You could say that it was a relationship of mutual benefit- mutualism must be recognised in everything you do.

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Fordhall Community Land Initiative Christmas 2006