

Designing places with people

Making community engagement count





Community engagement during design, refurbishment and development projects offers a range of opportunities to gather information, views and ideas that can help drive a project forward and create better informed, more sustainable places.

This resource has been designed to help anyone leading a project to develop or transform a building, space or neighbourhood, and the professionals working with them, to plan engagement activities and to collect the data they need to support their project.

Local people and users hold valuable expertise on their places, and accessing and recording this information in an effective way can inform a project vision and design brief, leading to higher quality design outcomes. Involving users and local people can also help strategise for the future, build a business plan and develop local support and partnerships. Funders frequently look for evidence of community engagement in their application processes, and building such an evidence base requires clear and well-recorded data collection. Ensuring that efficient data gathering techniques are built into all stages of a project is more likely to lead to activities that produce useful information and evidence.

What follows is a set of prompts to help you think more strategically about how your community engagement activities can help inform and support your design project, and how to build simple research and data gathering techniques into your engagement strategy.

Tidworth Mums Mega Soft Play Day

The following is a snapshot of a project that benefited from collecting valuable data through playful engagement activities. Building simple data gathering techniques into a fun day out for families, the group captured the local views and information to illustrate and evidence the need for greater play provision in their area.

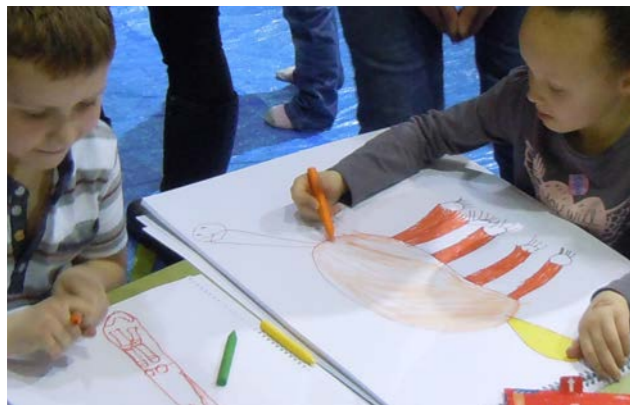
Tidworth Mums, a small group of mums in the garrison town in Tidworth, had experience of running creative activities for local families and they wanted to explore the idea for a new soft play centre to help strengthen social ties and tackle social isolation, as well as provide a much needed service for younger children.

They were keen to test the feasibility of their idea and to explore local need and preferences for play provision. Working in



partnership with Wiltshire District Council, the Army Welfare Service, the Open University and the Glass-House Community Led Design, Tidworth Mums organised Mega Soft Play Day during a school half term. The event was designed to meet an immediate need for out-of-school activities, and to build in playful engagement activities to help them better understand and evidence local need and interest.

Activities to collect evidence included:



Drawing and modelling

Children were asked to imagine and design their ideal play area using different drawing and modelling materials available.

Voting

Participants were asked to vote for their preferred type of play by:

- placing jellybeans into the corresponding jar
- placing sticky dots on a large site plan of the play areas

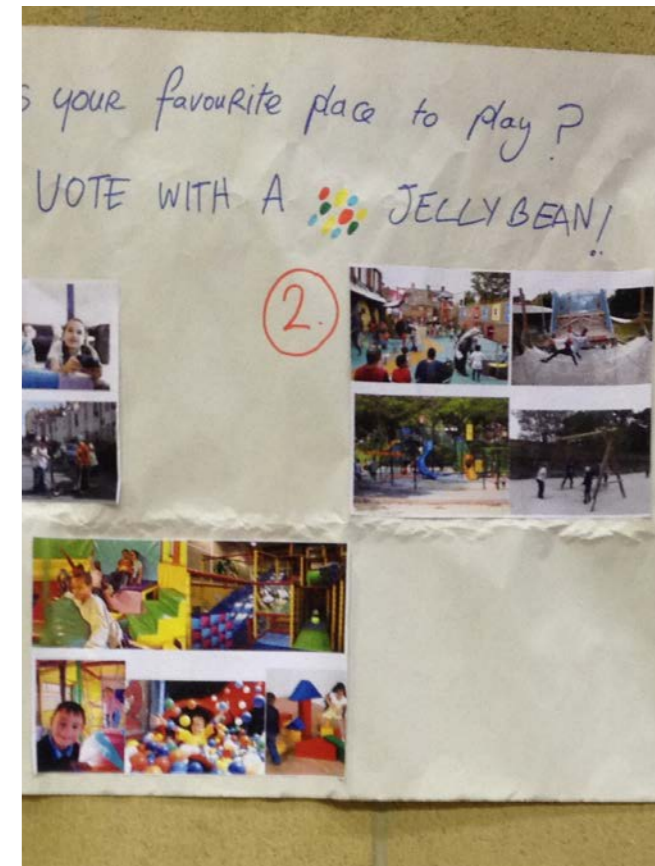


Interviews

Short interviews were also conducted with children (and their parents) to learn about their preferred areas within the soft play area as they experienced it on the day.

Survey

They used a survey to gather views on the likelihood and expected frequency of visits, the preferred days, the preferred type of play and the amount of money that they were willing to pay for the service. The survey was used at their Mega Soft Play Day in face-to face interviews, and was accessible online for an extended period, using a free online platform called Survey Monkey.



Working with students: Bow Church

When St Mary's Church in Bow, East London developed some community engagement activities with students from University College London, they carefully planned how they would collect useful data. Bow Church is a Grade II* listed building and one of the few remaining medieval buildings in east London. The church is at the centre of an area of rich history. They run music, arts and heritage events and are part of the local food bank. However, the church is in need of repair and maintenance works and envisages a number of changes to improve accessibility and its ability to host a wide range of community activities.

As part of their collaboration with the church, the students organised a workshop that invited members of the wider community into the church. Community members explored and discussed their



views on the building and how it could better serve its surrounding community. For one of the activities, visitors were given an outline of Bow Church along with magazines, papers, colouring pens, scissors and glue, to illustrate their vision about the building's future. Another activity invited participants to use a map of the area and mark local landmarks and places that are important to them. These activities reinforced previously identified opportunities for using the church space more widely for music and arts activities, and generated new ideas they hadn't considered before, such as sports activities or film nights.

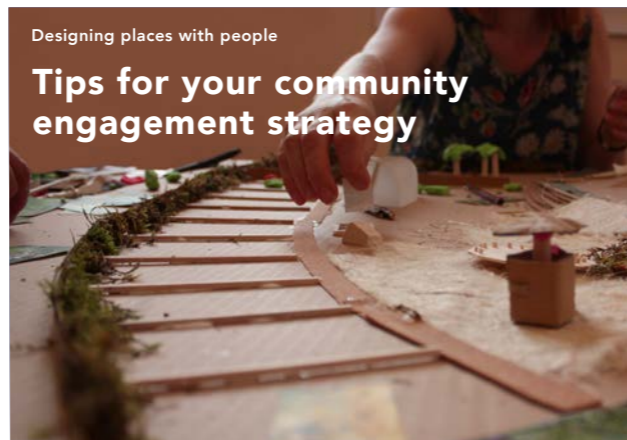
These insights, together with data collected through street interviews, were formed into a community audit document by the students. The audit provided an important evidence base which fed into the church's reports to their funders and into subsequent successful funding applications.



Building an engagement strategy

An effective engagement strategy is essential to any collaborative design project that serves a community. No matter what the scale of a project, or who is leading it, engaging with your community of interest and your local area can add huge value to the design process, as well as help build valuable support for your project.

Every engagement strategy should draw together a number of different activities which will allow people and organisations to contribute in different ways, and with different levels of intensity. These activities can fulfil various objectives within your strategy (eg. communicating project information, getting to know the local context, generating ideas, building capacity etc).



Our complementary resource **Tips for your community engagement strategy** provides more information on how to develop your community engagement strategy.

For a digital version of either resource, visit the Empowering Design Practices website.

Making community engagement count



In this resource, we are focusing on engagement activities that can help you collect data and build evidence. This can inform your decision-making, and help you reach various key milestones in your design process. It is also essential in helping you build support and attract funding.

In simple terms, knowledge is power, and being able to demonstrate what you know with hard evidence places you on an entirely different footing as project leaders, champions and negotiators.

There are a number of different interactive and creative ways to collect data and evidence. They can and should be built in at all stages of your engagement strategy, be accessible and enjoyable for those who engage, and as easy as possible for those running engagement activities to manage and process afterwards.

The prompts and examples that follow are designed to help you think through the data collection opportunities of different activities, and how any activity might help you serve a number of different engagement and project objectives.

Before you start

Whenever you invite people into engagement activities, be mindful of the way you are interacting with them and what you are asking of them. When gathering data, there are a number of key considerations to bear in mind:

What data and evidence do you need?

Be clear about what information and evidence you need to gather, and how it can inform your project as a whole. Make sure you understand whether it is factual information, views and opinions, or ideas that you want to collect, and how these will inform the next steps of your project.

What will the data be used for?

Think about the decisions you are trying to make and the specific evidence you will need to support them. This can help you set clear objectives and target audiences for your engagement activities. Try to keep your activities and data collection as simple as possible in order to meet your actual needs.



Who will provide the data you need?

Consider who you need to connect with to access the data you need. This may include local people, groups, organisations or businesses, and either existing or potential users of your buildings or spaces. Be clear about what data you need from each source and when it is appropriate and useful to engage them.

Who is collecting the data?

Be clear about roles within your team, and who is responsible for collecting which data. This can help ensure that valuable data collection opportunities are not lost, and that each person is able to carry out manageable and realistic tasks during the engagement activities.

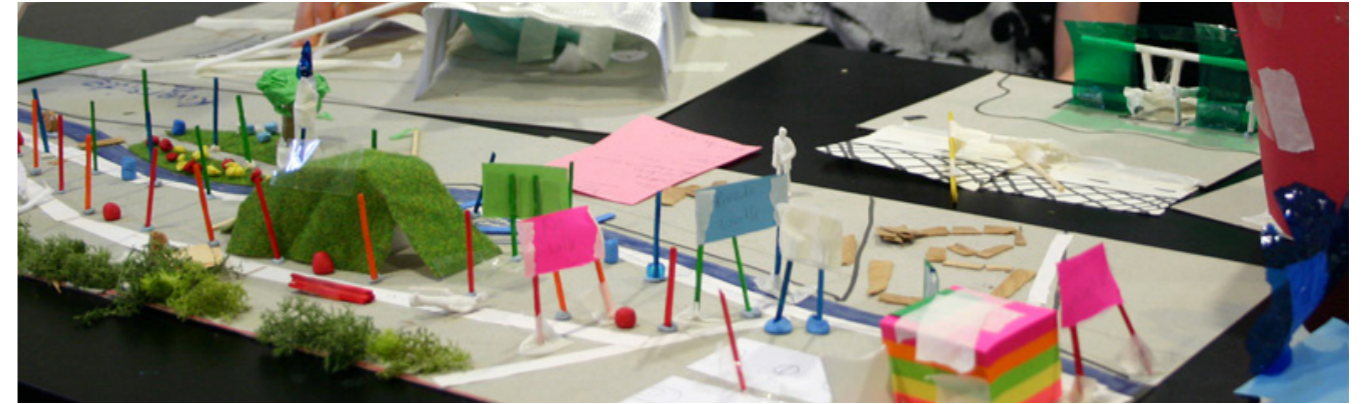


Capturing, processing and storing data

Consider carefully how you will capture, process, store and share data. Remember data protection laws, and get permission for any personal data you may wish to store or share. Make sure you understand consent and permissions.

Ethics and social implications

Think about how to balance your data collection needs with participant experience and ethics. This can be something as simple as making sure to include an "other" box when gathering information about religion, race or gender.



Accessibility and Inclusivity

Make sure your space and activities are as inclusive and accessible to people with wide ranging needs as possible. Think of accessibility and inclusivity in broad terms, considering everything from time of day, location and childcare, to catering for physical and learning differences, and cultural practices. Make sure any written resources are clear and easy to understand, and cater for different levels of literacy and fluency.

Playful, welcoming and fun

Engaging communities works well when it is playful and creative. People want to engage when a space is inviting and welcoming. Don't underestimate the power of an open door, tea and cake, and activities that allow people to engage in a variety of interactive ways. Remember that different people will respond to different ways of expressing themselves, and will feel more inclined to do so through an activity that they enjoy.

Categories of data gathering

Throughout your project you will need to gather a number of different kinds of data. Considering this can help you plan the most useful and appropriate types of activities for the different needs and stages of your project. Once you are aware of the sort of data you need, you can consider which tools or methods might be most useful for collecting this information.

Documenting and Evaluating

Some data gathering tools can be used to make sure your event / activity itself is documented and recorded and that you have the data required for post-event evaluation. This helps you keep a complete record of your activities.

Capturing participant information

It is usually vital to track the number and diversity of the people who have participated in an engagement activity. This is essential to understanding and demonstrating the range and breadth of your engagement.

Mapping the local context

It is essential to understand and evidence what is needed, what is wanted and what is possible. You can use these systematic approaches to identify, understand and record local activities, resources, connections, experience and knowledge.

Capturing views and opinions

If community engagement is to usefully inform your project, you will need methods to effectively collect people's views and opinions. Tools like this can capture what participants think about things now, or about possibilities for the future that are being explored. This can help you better understand a spectrum of local views, concerns and aspirations, and respond to them through what you achieve with your project.

Generating and capturing ideas

You will come to a stage of your project when you will need to generate fresh ideas to move your process forward. Community engagement activities can be effective ways of doing this. Useful tools for these moments can help you unleash the creativity and imagination of those you are engaging. This can help bring new direction, energy and ingenuity to your project and design process.

Design project milestones and data

Engagement activities can inform different milestones in your design journey. Here are a few key milestones of any collaborative design project, to get you thinking about how the data you collect through your engagement activities can support them.

Understanding local need

Find out about what would be most useful within the local area, and what your project could provide.

Identifying stakeholders and partners

Explore which people and groups have an active or potential interest in working with you and in using your building/spaces.

Understanding your building / spaces

Explore how your building is working now (form, function and feeling), and what impact changes and interventions could have.

Developing a shared vision

Bring people together to identify a common purpose and shared values for your project.

Developing a design brief

Become more focused in pinpointing the needs and desires of the project and work towards developing a design brief.

Sourcing funding

Build the evidence you need to support funding applications or to secure investment.

Business planning

Gather data to help you think strategically about the future of your building / space and to develop a business plan that will sit alongside your design brief.

Reflecting and feeding back

Reflect, evaluate and gather feedback from participants on your collaborative design process and outcomes.

Design decision-making








Explore and test options for your building or space, and make design choices.

Use this legend to explore how the example activities can help you gather data and reach project milestones.

Categories of data gathering

- Documenting and evaluating
- Participant information
- Mapping the local context
- Capturing opinions
- Generating ideas

Project milestones

-  Understanding local need
-  Understanding your building / spaces
-  Identifying stakeholders and partners
-  Developing shared vision
-  Developing a design brief
-  Business planning
-  Sourcing funding
-  Design decision-making
-  Reflecting and feeding back

There are many different activities that you can build into your engagement strategy as part of your design process. On the following pages we have included some example engagement activities or tools.

Use the legend on the left side of each double-page spread to help you explore which activities can help you gather different categories of data, and how they can contribute to different project milestones. The examples have been organised across these pages by categories of data gathering. The icons will help illustrate how any one activity can help you meet a number of different objectives, which you may have at different stages of your design journey.

Documenting and evaluating



Audio Recording

Audio recording can offer an accessible way to capture and later share different voices and views. Hearing the spoken words of others can also be an inspiring way to engage new people in the conversation. Audio recording can offer a useful alternative to taking notes during a conversation, which will free you up to engage more actively yourself.



Photos and videos

Quality photos and short films can be invaluable for both recording and future publicity. Many phones have excellent cameras these days, so whilst professional photography is fantastic there is a lot you can do yourself. A video can help document and share your event, as well as inspire and engage others. Film-making and photography can also be a fun and accessible way for some people to explore and express views and perspectives on a place.












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Documenting and evaluating



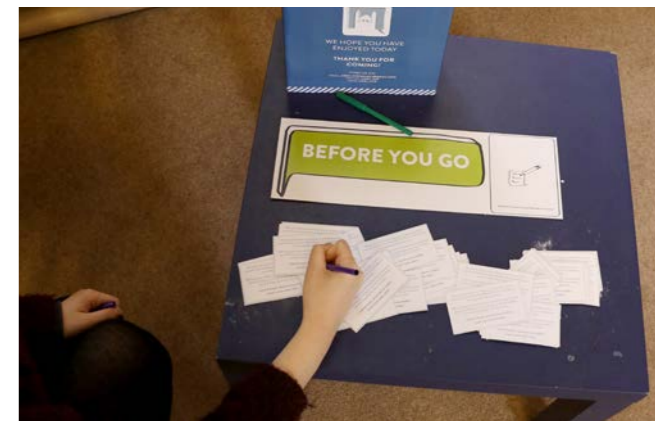
Number Counting

Accurate numbers of how many people took part in your event or attended your activity can be useful evidence for funders. It can also help you consider how many people your space can accommodate, which is crucial to planning future uses for your building.



Social Media

Sharing your event or activity on social media can massively increase its reach and help build awareness of your building and project. Live Tweeting during discussions can broaden the conversation and share a written record of some of the key themes. Don't forget local websites like Nextdoor to reach out to your community.



Feedback forms

Feedback can help you reflect on your event and plan for next time. It can also be useful evidence for funding applications and business plans, showing ways participants have responded to and benefited from activities you have run.



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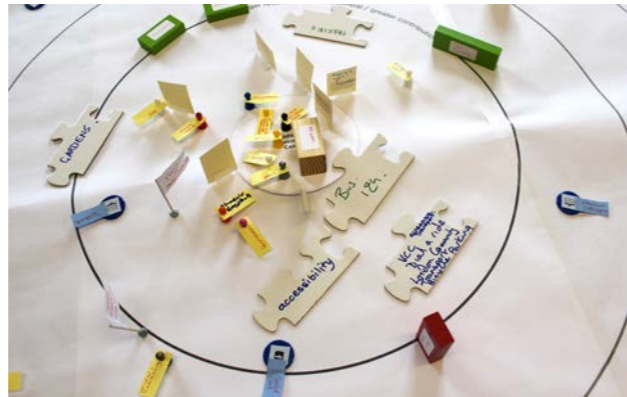
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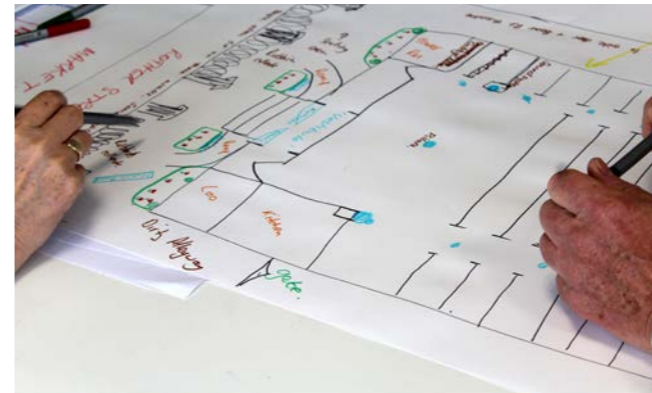
- 🔍 Understanding local need
- 🏠 Understanding your building / spaces
- 👥 Identifying stakeholders and partners
- 👁️ Developing shared vision
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Mapping the local context



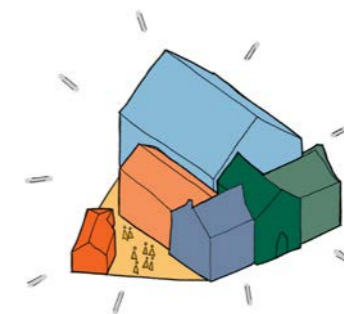
Asset mapping

Every community has assets, sometimes recognised and sometimes hidden or taken for granted. These may be people, skills, values, objects, activities, buildings, spaces, relationships and networks, or financial support. Creating and keeping a visual representation of this with your community can be a powerful tool for visualising your project's focus, and can unearth and mobilise people and actions.



Memory mapping

Memory mapping creates space for people to capture and share their memories and feelings about a place. You can use a pre-existing map or plan of your space, or draw your own during the task, and note down memories, feelings and reflections associated with different parts of the building. Through this, people can communicate what is important and special about a building, but also the spaces that need revisiting and improving. The map can serve as a useful record.



BY TAKING ON ONE AREA AT A TIME, THE BUILDING CAN BE GRADUALLY IMPROVED

Spatial mapping

Mapping different areas on a geographical map, floor plan or model can be used to create a visual representation of spaces, how they relate to each other and how the spaces are used. Spatial mapping can be a fun and engaging way for people to work together to reflect on and capture how a place is working. This technique can also be used to identify opportunities and where things may need to change.



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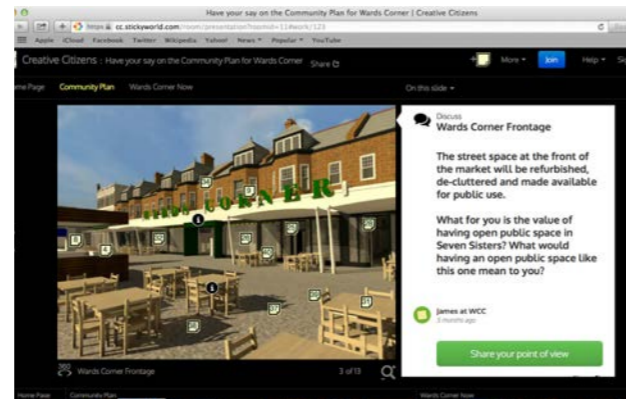
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Capturing opinions



Apps and online

Online methods of data collection, such as Survey Monkey or Stickyworld, or other online engagement platforms, can enable large numbers of your community to post comments, ideas and feedback. They can also be set up to do some of the data processing for you. While they are not for everyone and should sit alongside face-to-face activities, they offer a space for connection which is accessible from different locations, at different times of day.



Surveys and questionnaires

Surveys and questionnaires can be useful for gathering a large quantity of data quickly, in a way that's easy to analyse. Surveys are particularly useful for compiling statistical information. Not everyone will take the time to fill them in, so always be clear about the numbers of respondents you are basing this information on. Also be mindful that how you phrase questions can influence responses.



Voting

Gathering people's views and opinions can be playful and creative. Something as simple as voting on options can be brightened by utilising coloured sticks or jelly beans in jars. You can tailor your method to your audience, eg jelly beans may engage children who can "sneak" a few to eat at the same time.



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Capturing opinions



Interviews

Interviewing can offer a useful opportunity to target particular questions, people and areas of exploration and can be either arranged or impromptu. Interviews benefit from being held in a quiet space that is away from the hustle and bustle of other activities. Always ask permission to record interviews and agree with the interviewee, whether you can quote them, or if they would like to remain anonymous.



Focus groups

Focus groups can bring together a small group of people to explore shared and conflicting views and to test ideas on a particular theme. Bringing together a manageable group for a conversation can give people space to follow up on or expand on their initial responses and to talk through their views with others. Making sure this information is written up, perhaps in a short report, means it can be useful in your project down the line.



Walkabouts

A walkabout can help tap into people's emotional and sensory responses to a place, as well as draw attention to practical challenges and opportunities of different spaces. Think about how you can record these views, either through audio recording or through asking participants to take photos or notes during or after the walkabout.












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Capturing opinions



Annotating models and drawings

Annotating drawings and models can help participants quickly share views on what is working and not working in a building or space, and express ideas for how they might change in the future. Models in particular can help give people a more visual and tactile way to explore and discuss the whole of the building quickly and practically, enabling them to clearly express their views on a space.



Postcards

Postcards are useful for a quick and attractive capture of ideas, and can be used playfully in many different contexts, from collecting snapshots of stories to displaying participants' visual ideas or design concepts. They can be simply displayed as part of an event, and stored for later data gathering.



Sticky walls

A sticky wall allows people to quickly contribute an idea or opinion in relation to a specific question or idea, and to do so anonymously. Be clear on what you're wanting people to respond to and make it easy for people to reply. Make sure there are necessary materials clearly available nearby (eg post-its, pens). You can use different colours and shapes to help you categorise or sort input.












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Generating ideas



Collaging

Collaging offers a creative and accessible way for people to express their ideas. Collaging can be done with a variety of materials, including images, and shapes, that people can put together to express moods, themes, concepts etc. Collaging can be particularly attractive to people who would like to express themselves creatively but feel less confident about drawing.



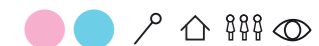
Models and Making

Rough modelling can help better understand how a building or space functions and generate ideas for interventions. The act of building a model of a building can help people understand how the spaces of a building fit together, and how spaces might be reconfigured or re-purposed. Models should be seen as objects that can be adapted and added to in order to test ideas, and that then offer a physical record of those explorations.



Roleplay

Roleplay can be a valuable way for people to better understand and empathise with the views of others, and to test scenarios for how people might use or behave in a space or building. Roleplay also allows people to use props to express their views and opinions and to negotiate decisions in a safe and playful space. Photography, video and audio recording can help capture this playful approach and demonstrate that you are engaging creatively.



When organising a community engagement activity or event for your project, many things require your attention and it can be easy to forget that the ethics of the event need to be considered.

Whenever you reach out to a community, be mindful of how you are interacting with them, and how you can best respect their autonomy, privacy and dignity. Do your best to understand and respect the varying values, customs and social norms, levels of confidence, skills and experience of those you engage. Give people a range of ways to articulate and defend their views and ideas. All of those participating should be treated with the same degree of respect and consideration, regardless of their age, gender, faith, ethnicity, education, socio-economic position and so on.

Your motivations should be made clear, and be supported by transparent and accountable processes. In simple terms, people need to understand why you are asking them for information, views and ideas, and how they will be used.

Above all, your engagement and research activities should begin with the principle that it will do no harm.



The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into effect in May 2018. This sets out standards of practice in protecting personal data. Any document in which a person can be identified is seen as a form of personal data, this includes forms, newsletter sign up sheets, photos or video. You can only keep personal data for a specific purpose, and cannot hold on to it 'in case'.

All data needs to be safeguarded to ensure that only those who have been permission to use it can do so.

Here are a few suggestions to help you safeguard data when planning engagement activities:

- 1 Keep questionnaires and feedback forms anonymous so you only have the data you need. Only ask questions about age, religion or other characteristics if they are relevant to your feedback.
- 2 If you are working with children (aged under 13) or with vulnerable adults, make sure you always have consent of an accompanying parent or guardian.
- 3 When using photography, film or audio recording at an event, put a poster up at the entrance to notify attendees how this will be used (e.g. social media, printed publication). Make it clear how attendees can let someone know if they do not want to be recorded, photographed or filmed.
- 4 Consider using consent forms. These should include the name of your group, information on what any data and media will be used for, how long it will be kept and how to contact you to ask questions or to request their data be deleted.
- 5 When registering people for an event or newsletter, make sure you do not contact them for anything other than what they have signed up for. Always give the option to opt out of any further communication.

For further advice on GDPR, visit:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/justice-and-fundamental-rights/data-protection/2018-reform-eu-data-protection-rules_en

Get the basics - make sure your activities are:

- inviting and welcoming
- creative and playful
- accessible and inclusive
- easy to run: keep clear roles and build in simple data gathering processes

Final summary - when collecting evidence

- Keep clear goals / objectives
- Keep clear roles and tasks
- Make data collection integrated, not disruptive
- Keep clarity around your activity – easy to grasp and do
- Consider how you will capture, process, use, store and share the data you collect
- Be discerning and practical
- Understand consent, permissions and rules – eg what does anonymity do?
- Consider ethics and social implications / norms of different activities
- Consider how much qualitative and quantitative data you need
- Keep things realistic and simple



Acknowledgements

Photo credits

Front cover: Materials gathered for activity during Utopias Fair, Prototyping Utopias research project

Inside front cover: Mapping challenges and opportunities at Bow Church, London,
Empowering Design Practices research project

- p. 2,3 Mega Soft Play Day with Tidworth Mums, Wiltshire District Council and Army Welfare Service, Unearth Hidden Assets research project
- p. 4, 5 Mega Soft Play Day with Tidworth Mums, Wiltshire District Council and Army Welfare Service, Unearth Hidden Assets research project
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 - ii. Young people using photography to capture their views on local green spaces. The Glass-House with Lend Lease, and Sacred Heart Catholic School © The Glass-House Community Led Design
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 - i. Social media used by Sheffield University students working with St Peter’s, Chester and St Peter’s Congleton, Empowering Design Practices research project
 - ii. Engagement event, Sheffield University students working with Cemetery Road Baptist Church Sheffield, Empowering Design Practices research project
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 - ii. Drawing from report by students from Sheffield University for the Isaac Centre as part of Empowering Design Practices Live Projects, Empowering Design Practices research project
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- p. 29 Sticky Wall at engagement stall, Newlyn Fish Festival, Empowering Design Practices research project
- p. 30 Collaging at Reimagining Moorfoot, The Glass-House We Design event in collaboration with Live Works, Sheffield © The Glass-House Community Led Design
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 - i. Model making at Design Training, Empowering Design Practices research project
 - ii. Role play, Comparative Asset Mapping research project
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- p. 37 Collecting ideas at Demystifying Design workshop, Empowering Design Practices research project

Inside back cover: Messages from Around the World at Utopias Fair, Prototyping Utopias research project

Back cover: Post its around photo from Demystifying Design workshop,
Empowering Design Practices research project

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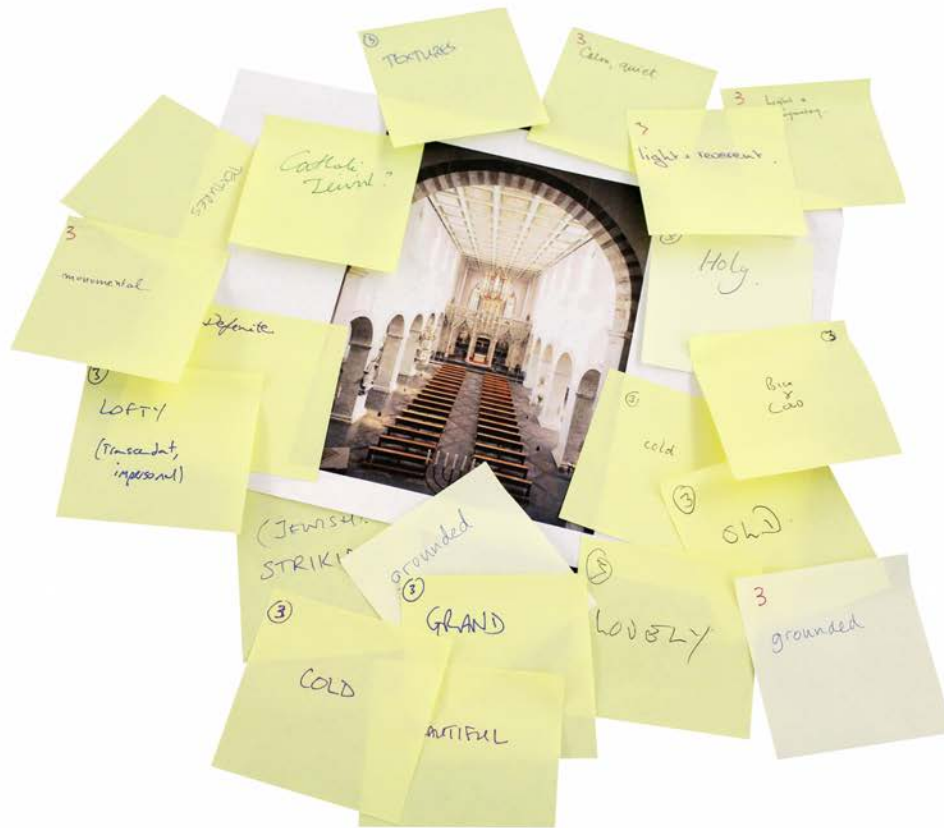
Empowering Design Practices is a research project exploring how community-led design can help empower those who look after historic places of worship to create more open, vibrant and sustainable places that respect and enhance their heritage. Working within this context, the project aims to develop insights and mechanisms (approaches, resources, training) to support community-led design and the development of places that connect and serve their communities.

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Empowering Design Practices
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Scaling Up Co-Design
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Comparative Asset Mapping
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