

University of Dundee

Citizen Science Projects (MOOC) 1.15

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Once you have formed your core team, you will want to start building your community. Your community might be:

- a group of people who live in the same place and are impacted by same issue
- A group of people who live in different places but are still impacted by the same issue
- or they may simply share your concern for the environment.

When building a community, the aim is for everyone to come to a shared understanding of the issue, the goals of the project, the organisation of the observatory, and how to tackle the tasks ahead. Your community's skills and interests can contribute to the development of the project. It is also a good time to include others with skills or expertise that might be missing in your group.

Here are some of the key steps to follow to build your community:

##Raise awareness

This week, we have been learning about engaging citizens in citizen observatories through the use of campaigns that tell people about the project and invite them to participate. Raising awareness about your project and its goals is the first step towards building an active community.

Refer back to the key questions that you thought about in the earlier step [Campaign design best practices](<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/weobserve-the-earth/1/steps/627132>), such as ‘Who is your target audience?’ and ‘How will you communicate with participants during the project?’. Consider which newspapers, social media channels, local community bulletin boards and other channels, might be good ways to raise awareness and reach potential participants.

Reach out as widely as you can to groups of people who are outside of your usual circles, who also share your concerns and might be affected by the outcome of your campaign. For example, nearby neighbourhoods and different age groups in your local area may be easy to reach and similarly affected.

Here are some methods of raising awareness:

- + Setting up a website
- + Setting up a Facebook Page or Group
- + Setting up a dedicated Twitter account
- + Setting up other types of social media accounts
- + Starting a digital or print newsletter
- + Running events that are listed on MeetUp or Eventbrite
- + Getting local radio or news coverage
- + Making flyers to hand out at local events or distribute in community centres
- + Making posters to hang in public spaces
- + Setting up promotional stands at community events
- + Asking existing community groups to help you spread the word via their channels

##Have a clear purpose

Be clear about the purpose of your citizen observatory, in a way that people can quickly understand. Can you summarise your purpose in one sentence? What is the main research question or the central task? How will the collected data or analyses be used, and to what end?

To get some inspiration for short and snappy purpose statements, visit the [SciStarter platform](<https://scistarter.org>) to see established citizen science projects, and browse projects on similar topics. This is also a great place to share and promote your own project!

##Consider the motivations of participants

Participants have different motivations. During the design phase of your project, think about how the issue relates to potential participants and to what extent. If your participants see the impact of the problem you identified in their daily life, such as the pollution in “their” river, they are more likely to take ownership of the project and stay engaged.

One of the strongest motivators is the desire to make a difference on the target issue. To achieve this:

- + Make sure that you have designed the research task to gather valuable data about the issue.
- + Develop a plan with your group for how the data could be used to create positive change.
- + Make progress towards this goal a central part of your communication planning, so that you can keep motivation high throughout the project.

##Support and encourage open communication

As you design your project, consider how you will keep in touch with participants, and how they will keep in touch with each other. You can use many of the same channels that you established for raising awareness about your project to share ongoing developments with everyone.

Do you have a website to which all community members can add content? Can community members share photos, experiences, and discoveries via social media?

Or there can be a social element to collecting data. For example, if a community in the same geographic area is collecting information on a local concern, they can have weekly “meet-ups” where they discuss the challenges they faced and share exciting insights or news.

Take the time to ask participants how they would like to communicate with each other and with you, and how they too can encourage more people to get involved.

Remember leaders or organisers have the capacity to build a real sense of community – you and your team should be visible and approachable. If your means of communication is primarily digital, make sure that you are frequently sharing videos and photos so that participants also have a sense of knowing people in the project.

##Assign a community manager

Make sure that questions and comments on digital channels don’t fall on deaf ears. Assign a member of the team, or a rota of members, to check all channels regularly. A good community manager should be proactive in sharing information and news, either finding the answer to questions themselves, or making the connection to others who do. Make sure that any shared suggestions or feedback from participants are captured in a usable way (e.g. a feedback document to collate relevant comments and suggestions).

Effective communication is critical to the success of any community but does not need to be filled 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. As long as members of the community receive responses in a timely fashion, they will be able to trust the channel of communication. A reply within 24

hours is reasonable. Additionally, a community manager should also encourage participants to answer questions themselves and actively help each other.

It is useful to set expectations with all participants as to how each communication channel should be used, and selected people in the team should actively moderate their use. This can be by way of a formal user agreement, or simply a clear statement about what is considered good or bad behaviour on that channel.

##Empower and encourage deeper engagement

Community members are most engaged when they can play a meaningful role in shaping the project, making key decisions, and planning how to use the resulting data for maximum impact. Make sure that you and your team are including all participants in decision making as much as possible throughout the project. Create opportunities to encourage participants to get more involved if they wish. Examples might include:

- + Invite participants to write guest blog posts
- + Invite participants to help design project materials and lead their own awareness-raising activities
- + Hold community-wide meetings to share progress, make suggestions for improvements, and plan next actions together
- + Create opportunities for participants to share their experiences and local knowledge of the issue with key decision-makers
- + Invite participants to present outcomes to key external stakeholders around the issue at stake
- + Invite ideas for other initiatives that might benefit the project

Share your thoughts!

Please tell us about some of the community-building efforts you have tried and how it went!

If you haven't done this yet, which ones do you think would be most effective for issues that you'd want to focus on? Why do you think so?