

Engaging Young People in Your Community Business



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Introduction

This guide was originally created as part of the resources for a programme funded by the Dulverton Trust, and delivered by the Plunkett UK between 2022-3, aimed at strengthening rural community businesses' engagement with young people.

During that time, rural community businesses were consulted to capture and share their experiences and motivations for engaging young people through facilitated open workshops.

Subsequently, this guide has been updated in 2026 in light of growing interest and concern about what is being referred to as a 'lost generation' of young people, with over 1 million not in any form of education, employment, or training according to the Office of National Statistics.

This refreshed guide now includes **additional referencing** to other published research about young people in rural communities, and signposting to current initiatives that community businesses might seek to engage with, as part of wider ambitions in this regard.

It is hoped that this guide will offer **an overview of the principal considerations and issues** that a community business might think about if they have an ambition to begin to engage with young people. Not only that but it can also be used as **a reference guide** for rural community businesses who are already engaging with young people and are wishing to consider how their current practices might be built on.

** For the purposes of this guide, a young person is defined as being between 16 – 24 years of age.*



1.1 Why bother engaging young people?

There are many reasons given as to why it is beneficial for any organisation to engage young people to take on different roles within it – however, to date Plunkett members identified the following as being the most pertinent to rural community businesses:

Succession

Many rural community businesses recognise the difficulty in sometimes recruiting future committee / Board members to roles in their governance.

However, some Plunkett members have found that inviting and enabling young people to take part in specific planning activities now, helps them build their confidence and interest in progressing into other governance roles in the future. They have also found that involving young people in these planning and review activities (whether they be regular events, or discrete) offers fresh perspectives to the current Board and committee to draw on, that results in greater outcomes and impacts subsequently being created.

Similarly, there can also be a difficulty for some rural community businesses to sustain a flow of volunteers to sustain their activities over time as people become less physically able, or move out of area. Engaging young people can build their interest and support to the enterprise which can be sustained as they grow older, so they are interested in playing a role within it as a volunteer in the future.

Matching the needs of young people with your opportunities for volunteers

Young people can also be easier to attract into roles owing to their being at an earlier stage in their working lives and careers. As such they recognise the need to develop skills and experiences for their CVs and other applications, that other groups of people would likely already have. They can therefore be more motivated to seek opportunities to take on different roles to gain these development opportunities.

Young people bring different aptitudes and skills to your community business

Younger people are generally more likely to be adept and confident with newer technologies, and so could offer rural community businesses valuable support in supporting their adoption (such as EPOS systems; starting to engage with social media to help promote the business or share news of the support offers it has to wider audiences).

Owing to their lifestyles, young people may also be more aware of emerging and changing trends in hospitality and retail. Access to these that can offer valuable insights for planning and managing community-owned businesses.

Engaging young people can strengthen links into the wider local economy and with other businesses in the area

Offering opportunities to young people within a community business need not have to rely on that business being able to offer that person a paid job in the future – it simply may not be financially possible, or even practically viable in light of other circumstances.

However, having supported that young person develop skills, confidence, and employability experience would make them of interest to other businesses who, in turn, may be seeking candidates to recruit.

Offering roles to young people can therefore also a 'pipeline' of future talent to benefit other local businesses and groups, and so contribute to the strengthening of the overall community and its economy.

1.2 Wider recognition and benefits

Other published research studies identify additional factors that support the case for rural community businesses to be deliberately considering their role in relation to engaging young people in their respective communities:

Retaining population and keeping rural places viable

Many rural communities can suffer a net outflow of population, as young people leave the area in search of paid employment.

Creating opportunities for them in local businesses can not only support and encourage them to stay in the area, but if linked to sectors such as tourism can positively enhance civic pride. In turn, this can also contribute to not only making the local area more desirable to remain living in, but also start to help attract new people to move into the area too.¹

Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour (actual and perceived)

Studies highlight a link between boredom and social isolation (especially amongst young people) and an increased risk of crime and anti-social behaviour. Having programmes that engage and support young people in social activities that help them into a work environment can reduce actual and perceived crime in a community.²

Recognition of community businesses being 'best model for young people'

Finally, there is also recognition that community businesses are usually the most empowering type of organisation in benefiting young people sustainability over time – but they are often overlooked in rural public policy agendas. This means that their profile, and the awareness of this, is usually limited which acts as a barrier to such businesses feeling able to commit to any actions.³

¹ Rural social enterprises in Europe: A systematic literature review; Lucas Olmedo; Local Economy: Journal of local Economy policy unit, 2020

² Filling a void? The role of social enterprise in addressing social isolation and loneliness in rural communities; Rachel Baker; Journal of Rural Studies, 2019

³ Rural social enterprise – Evidence to date, and a research agenda; Journal of Rural Studies Issue 70, 2019 and Rural social enterprises in Europe: A systematic literature review; Lucas Olmedo; Local Economy: Journal of local Economy policy unit, 2020

2 Considering a different approach for young people

Community businesses already have practices and systems in place for how people are engaged with and supported. Usually, these approaches are ‘generalised’ in the sense that they will treat all people the same – however, it can be useful to consider if it may be beneficial to adapt them specifically for young people:

Different motivations and needs to older people

Younger people will be at an earlier stage in their working lives, and so keen to find opportunities to develop skills and experiences to build their CVs for future employability.

In contrast, other groups of people may be more interested in the social aspects that volunteering and jobs can offer them. It might therefore be useful to consider designing specific roles that a young person could take on that could help them achieve these aspirations in order to best attract and engage them.

Less likely to want to commit long-term

Young people will also be more likely to expect themselves to be ‘socially mobile’, and so not be intending to make open-ended or longer-term commitments to roles that your community business can offer them.

As a result, consider designing roles to be time-limited, such as a placement, or to deliver a specific defined project. This might help a young person better feel able to engage with the opportunity owing to not feeling that they would need to be making a longer-term commitment which might otherwise make them feel unable to apply for it.



3 Making it work

If a community business hasn't involved young people before, there are a few overarching ideas that it could be useful to consider:

You don't have to work it all out by yourself

In addition to the Plunkett Facebook group communities where fellow groups often and freely share experiences, guidance, and signposting with each other, there are also several national youth volunteering bodies who publish guidance, templates, and checklists (see later in this resource for signposting links).

There will also be organisations and groups in the local area who have an interest in wanting to support young people gain opportunities to develop skills and gain new experiences. These might include schools for student projects and work placements; the local Scouts / Guides groups, Duke of Edinburgh awards programmes; and such like. Reaching out to bodies like these can help identify and secure additional support and resource to help you engage young people.

Community share offers

Many community businesses engage their community through share offers – however, as young people can typically have less disposable income than other age groups, the minimum investment amounts may exclude them from being able to engage with the business in this way.

However, this could be resolved through structuring a staged payment for the share, in the same way that the Rochdale Pioneers did in 1844 (for context, their £1 minimum shareholding was equivalent to nearly a month's wages today). Contact Plunkett UK for help in thinking this through.

Co-design approaches

Ultimately, the people who know what ways of engaging and supporting them will work the best, are the young people themselves. Involving them in conversations about their interests, needs, circumstances, etc before finalising roles and processes will mean that young people are more likely to engage and sustain them, having had a voice in how they were designed.



4 Trying to not trip up despite best intentions

Sometimes, despite best intentions on all sides, things might not always work out as hoped or anticipated for all sorts of reasons. With that in mind, when designing and creating roles and systems around engaging young people in a community business:

Time is of the essence

The amount of time available to a young person in light of family commitments, school and education, the need to travel using public routes, etc means that they will likely be able to offer less than other groups of people. Being able to recognise this in roles created, and the impacts of other factors in a young persons' life which may impinge on their ability to consistently maintain a role, might help to mitigate future frustrations or tensions.

We all have to start somewhere

It is likely that for the young person engaging with a community business, this will be their first experience of doing anything like this. As a result, they will likely understandably be more nervous / lack confidence than other groups of people. Therefore, it may be useful to think about having more frequent check-ins, and longer induction periods than might be offered for others.

The generation game

Finally, when thinking about engaging young people, it can be useful to consider the impact that doing so will have on the culture and experiences of the people currently involved in an existing community business.

For some people, they may not have had experience of working alongside young people before, and so be nervous or concerned about potential impacts to ways of working that they feel familiar and comfortable with. It may therefore be useful to consider creating opportunities to have conversations about any concerns and hopes people may have, and how these can be acknowledged and acted on.

Similarly, younger people may also have concerns and hopes about working with older generations – give them space to voice this, and then encourage each group to reflect on how each will consider approaching the other in light of this understanding could be beneficial in strengthening working relationships and the culture of a community business.



5 The lost generation?

During 2026, data from the Office of National Statistics highlighted that there are over 1 million young people who are ‘NEET’ (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). This has led to concerns of what some refer to of a ‘lost generation’, as various researches highlight how if a young person is NEET over a prolonged period they are more likely to remain unemployed, be in worst health, and suffer financial poverty over the course of the rest of their life.

As such, various targeted national initiatives have been created by the UK Government. At the time of this guide’s publication, these include:

Financial incentives to employ a young person

Any organisation employing a young person can qualify for a one-off payment of £3,000. Additionally, if they are able to create/offer apprenticeship opportunities for a young person, this can trigger a payment of £2,000 to the hosting business.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-employment-drive-to-help-unlock-200000-new-jobs-and-apprenticeships-for-next-generation>

And if the young person is under the age of 21, the employer is also exempt from needing to pay employer national insurance contributions on their wages.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cz9qdpzqn12o>

Youth guarantee scheme

Any young person who has not been in work for 18 months can apply for a 6-month placement in the construction, care, or hospitality sectors.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/employment-lifeline-for-young-people-across-the-country-as-government-offers-300000-new-work-experience-and-training-placements>

Part of this initiative can also include the potential for the hosting employer to be fully reimbursed for the cost of employing a young person in this way.

<https://www.cipp.org.uk/resources/news/the-jobs-guarantee-grant-employer-factsheet.html>

Youth employment hubs

Drawing on a proven model from the Netherlands, the UK government is rolling out a national network of youth hubs. These are intended to act as a focal and centralised point to better co-ordinate employment, education, housing, health and welfare support.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-roll-out-dutch-style-employment-support-across-britain>

(There may also be local initiatives throughout the country, so a community business should always check with their local networks and contacts what additional options may exist).

6 Where next?

As already stated, the purpose of this resource is to act as an introductory guide and overview for community businesses thinking about engaging young people more in their enterprise.

It is based on the experiences of Plunkett's member businesses, as well as reflections from online workshops. As such, it is not intended to be definitive, but rather a 'starting point' to help community businesses best begin to involve young people in different ways.

There are **several national bodies** who specialise in offering guidance, checklists, templates, and advice on involving young people in community organisations, and it may be beneficial to review their resources in building on the knowledge and insight this one has offered:

<https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/volunteering/youth/>

<https://volunteermatters.org.uk/power-of-youth-charter/>

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/supporting-and-managing-volunteers/engaging-young-people/>

In addition, **there are also several other publications** from different agencies around England that offer case studies, and additional insights and planning support.

Although they all share a focus on volunteering roles over paid/employed roles, the themes and considerations they highlight are equally pertinent to both:



<https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/2234/involving-young-volunteers-handbook-good-practice-guidance>

<https://www.volunteerfirst.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Young-Volunteers-Toolkit-2-1.pdf>

If you would like support and advice to help you involve more young people in your community business, please call our Community Business Team, on info@plunkett.co.uk or 01993 630022.

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