Module 6 (Part 2)

Inclusive Community Engagement for SMEs

Part 2: Understand & Engage Your Community: Foundations for Inclusive Impact.

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DARE
DIVERSITIES ARE REVIVING ENTERPRISES

Discover the DARE Modules Learning Pathway:

Enjoy our learning blocks designed to help SMEs build diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces. Unlock the power of how DEI to drive the sustainable success of your company. Our practical and interactive Modules deliver real life insights and case studies from a European perspective – Join us in creating workplaces and communities where everyone can thrive!

MODULE 1
Introduction: Diversities Reviving European Enterprises

Key Features: *Overview and definitions of D&I in SMEs. 12 Dimensions of Diversity. Learning key competencies for business case delivery.*

Part 1: Why D&I Matters for SMEs.
Part 2: Building D&I Competencies for SMEs.

MODULE 2
Inclusive Leadership Skills

Key Features: *Develop inclusive leadership skills (e.g., Bias awareness and mitigation). Tap into the power of neurodiversity. Measure impact and build resilience.*

Part 1: Prepare for Inclusive Change Through Leadership.
Part 2: Unlock Inclusive Leadership & Neurodiversity.
Part 3: Measure Leadership Impact & Build Resilience.

MODULE 3
Inclusive Talent Management for SMEs

Key Features: *Inclusive advertising, recruitment and retention. Performance management and leadership succession planning.*

Part 1: Attracting, Developing, and Retaining Diverse Talent.
Part 2: Creating Inclusive Job Descriptions & Adverts.
Part 3: Inclusive Selection, Interviewing, and Offer Strategies.
Part 4: Employee Talent Development and Retention.
Part 5: Performance Management and Feedback.
Part 6: Succession Planning and Leadership Development.

MODULE 6
Inclusive Community Engagement for SMEs

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Key Features: *Learn the six core principles of inclusive community engagement. Understand the four layers to community context and prepare an effective Engagement Framework and Action Plan.*

Part 1: Foundations of Inclusive Community Engagement.
Part 2: Understand & Engage Your Community.
Part 3: Ensuring Inclusive Engagement through Shared Value.
Part 4: Prepare for an Effective Community Engagement Framework.
Part 5: Create a Community Engagement Framework & Action Plan.

MODULE 5
Inclusive Marketing For SMEs

Key Features: *Embed inclusivity into branding. Understand the needs of diverse audiences. Craft strategic inclusive marketing campaigns.*

Part 1: The Power of Inclusive Marketing for SME Brands.
Part 2: Understand Your Customers and Overcome Marketing Barriers.
Part 3: Crafting Inclusive Marketing Campaigns.

MODULE 4
Building an Inclusive Company Culture in SMEs

Key Features: *Build an inclusive company culture. Design and deliver a strategic cultural change audit, review policies and practices and empower teams through reward and recognition.*

Part 1: Understand and Build an Inclusive Company Culture.
Part 2: Design and Deliver a Strategic Cultural Change Audit.
Part 3: Support Management in Creating a Workplace of Belonging.
Part 4: From Policies to Practice: Cultivating a Culture of Inclusion.
Part 5: Empower Teams Through DEI Collaboration, ERGs, and Recognition.

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Introduction DARE to Module 6

Inclusive Community Engagement for SMEs

This module is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of inclusive community engagement ensuring that every voice is heard and respected.

Part 1: Explore the Principles: Shared Values, Representation, Accessibility, Transparency, Respect, and Empowerment.

Part 2: Identify diverse community layers—residents, culture, sectors, and resources. Develop strategies encourage participation, and build community pride.

Part 3: Create shared value by integrating diverse perspectives, mobilizing collective action.

Part 4: Build engagement teams, refine strategies, and facilitate inclusive conversations that ensure all voices are heard.

Part 5: Learn to design a sustainable Community Engagement Framework with clear objectives, stakeholder involvement, and measurable outcomes, ensuring long-term impact and adaptability.

Section 1

Section 2

Section 3

Section 4

Section 5

YOU ARE HERE

Foundations of Inclusive Community Engagement: Principles, Practices, and Benef

Understand & Engage Your Community: Foundations for Inclusive Impact.

Ensuring Inclusive Engagement through Shared Value and Community Empowerment.

Prepare for an Effective Community Engagement Framework: Step-by-Step Guide.

Create a Community Engagement Framewor & Develop a Collaborative Action Plan

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Part 5

M6:Part 2

Identify & Understand Your Community. Learn 'who' exactly makes up your community, so you know exactly who you are serving and how you need to interact differently with different groups.

Understand the Four Layers to Community Context. Learn to unfold the layers and integrate with your company values and enable shared value.

1. Residents, Culture, and History
2. Business, Government, and Nonprofit Sector(s) and Coalitions
3. Programs, Policies, Plans, & Systems
4. Resources, Environments, and Location

Strategies to Build Trust and Connection. Covers key strategies such as creating a safe and inclusive space, adapting to community needs, encouraging active participation and enabling pride in community and place.

01 Identify & Understand Your Community

02 Understand the Four Layers to the Community Context

03 Strategies to Build Trust and Connection

Exercise: Identify and List Your Community

Exercise: Prepare Framework for Community Context

Exercise: Start Researching & Talking to Your Community

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

1. **Identify & Understand Your Community –** recognise the diverse groups that make up your community and tailor engagement strategies to effectively serve and interact with them.

2. **Analyze the Four Layers of Community Context** – Unfold the different layers of community dynamics and integrate them with your business values to create shared value.

- Residents, Culture, and History

- Business, Government, and Nonprofit Sectors & Coalitions

- Programs, Policies, Plans, and Systems

- Resources, Environments, and Location

3. **Apply Strategies to Build Trust & Connection** – Implement key strategies for creating meaningful relationships, such as creating an inclusive space, adapting to community needs, promoting participation, and strengthening community pride.

Identify & Understand Your Community

SME Inclusive Community Engagement

SMEs need to understand their community and stakeholders first in inclusive community engagement because it ensures their efforts are relevant, meaningful, and effective. By identifying who they serve, their diverse needs, and the challenges they face, SMEs can tailor their engagement strategies to enable effective, efficient programs, trust, inclusivity, and create mutual benefit.

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Identify Who Your Community Is!

SMEs need to understand their community and stakeholders first in inclusive community engagement because it ensures their efforts are relevant, meaningful, and effective.

By identifying who they serve, their diverse needs, and the challenges they face, SMEs can tailor their engagement strategies to enable effective, efficient programs, trust, inclusivity, and create mutual benefit.

Recognising your community and key stakeholders—such as customers, local companies, community supports, policymakers, and marginalised groups—helps businesses build authentic relationships, align their initiatives with community priorities, and create long-term positive impact. Without this understanding, engagement efforts risk being superficial, disconnected, or even harmful to the very people they aim to support.

Identify Who Your Community Is!
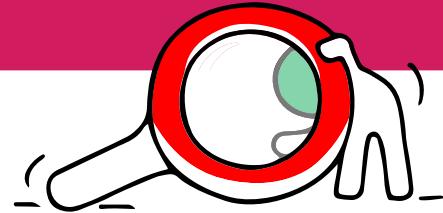
SMEs need to research to develop an Engagement Framework so that they can effectively engage with local communities through informal, authentic interactions that build trust, empathy, and a shared understanding of local priorities. To effectively engage with your community, you first need to understand who your community is made up of, their characteristics, and needs.

Understand Who Your Community is: Start by learning about the people you want to engage with. Ask yourself:

❑ **Define Your Scope**: Are you engaging with local residents, small businesses, artisans, schools, or a mix?

❑ **Who are they?** (E.g., local residents, artisans, businesses, or environmental groups.)

❑ **Identify Needs, Challenges and Interests**: What are the needs or challenges the community face? What are their goals or values? What's important to them? (E.g., sustainability, employment, cultural heritage.)

Communities Can Include.

In inclusive marketing and community engagement, various groups of people and organisations are involved, each playing a distinct role in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusivity. Here's a breakdown of the different people involved, along with definitions and examples:

1. Consumers (Target Audience)

Definition: Consumers are individuals or groups who purchase goods and services. They are at the heart of any marketing campaign, and their needs, preferences, and cultural contexts drive the inclusivity efforts of brands.

❖ **Example:** A brand targeting a diverse audience, such as Dove, ensures that their marketing materials and products reflect various body types, ethnicities, and ages, ensuring that their message resonates with all consumers.

2. Community Leaders

Definition: Community leaders are individuals or representatives of a specific group or locality who are trusted voices and advocates within their communities. They help identify key needs and ensure that initiatives are relevant and beneficial to their members.

❖ **Example:** A local community leader working in collaboration with a business to promote inclusive health services for underrepresented groups, like women or elderly people, ensuring that the services cater to their specific needs.

3. Organizations (NGOs and Non-Profits)

Definition: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations work towards social, environmental, or cultural causes. They often partner with businesses to implement inclusive initiatives and create social value.

❖ **Example:** Dove partners with NGOs like the **National Eating Disorders Association** (NEDA) to help provide educational resources and support regarding body image and self-esteem.

4. Advocacy Groups

Definition: Advocacy groups work to represent and promote the interests of a particular group, such as marginalised communities, individuals with disabilities, or underrepresented races. These groups are pivotal in identifying gaps in inclusion and ensuring that businesses take action to address them.

- ❖ **Example:** The **Civil Liberties Union for Europe** advocates for civil rights, and businesses can collaborate with such groups to ensure that their practices and campaigns support equal rights for all.

5. Employees (Internal Stakeholders)

Definition: Employees are the individuals who work within a company. Their engagement in inclusive practices is essential for creating an inclusive workplace that values DEI. Employees help shape company culture and can act as champions for inclusivity internally and externally.

- ❖ **Example:** A company like Google provides diversity and inclusion training to its employees, creating an inclusive workplace where employees from various backgrounds can thrive.

6. Influencers and Content Creators

Definition: Influencers and content creators have a significant impact on their followers and are often seen as trusted figures. They use their platforms to promote products, services, or causes, often shaping public opinion.

❖ **Example:** Social media influencers who advocate for body positivity and mental health, such as **Chidera Eggerue**, help amplify brands like Dove by aligning with their inclusive messaging.

7. Industry Experts and Consultants

Definition: Industry experts and consultants offer advice and insights on best practices related to inclusivity, diversity, and cultural competence. They can guide businesses in implementing inclusive strategies and policies.

❖ **Example:** A business consulting firm specializing in D&I can help companies like Starbucks create inclusive hiring practices, provide diversity training, and audit their corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.

8. Government and Policy Makers

Definition: Governments and policymakers create and enforce laws, regulations, and policies that promote inclusivity in business practices. Their role is vital in shaping the framework within which businesses operate.

❖ **Example:** The **Equality Act 2010** in the UK is a piece of legislation designed to protect people from discrimination based on various characteristics, including age, race, gender, disability, and more.

9. Partners and Suppliers

Definition: Partners and suppliers refer to businesses or organizations that work with other companies in a mutually beneficial relationship, such as providing goods or services. These partnerships can extend inclusivity efforts across the supply chain.

❖ **Example:** A clothing brand partnering with local artisans from indigenous communities to ensure fair trade practices and promote the representation of indigenous culture in fashion.

10. Media Outlets and Journalists

Definition: Media outlets and journalists are responsible for broadcasting and publishing stories that impact public perception. They can play a key role in advocating for inclusivity by covering diverse stories and promoting inclusive brands.

❖ **Example:** The **New York Times** or **BBC** covering stories of companies taking steps towards inclusivity, highlighting the work of brands like Nike in promoting women's sports or the **Black Lives Matter** movement.

11. Consumers with Disabilities

Definition: Consumers with disabilities represent an often overlooked segment in marketing. Their specific needs—such as accessibility in products, services, and communications—should be addressed for true inclusivity.

❖ **Example:** A tech company like Apple designs products that are accessible to people with disabilities, including voice-activated functions for visually impaired users.

12. Underrepresented or marginalised Groups

Definition: These groups include people who face social, economic, or cultural disadvantages, such as racial minorities, LGBTQ+ communities, and people living in poverty. Ensuring their representation in marketing, products, and services is a key aspect of inclusivity.

Example: The **Transgender Equality Project** advocates for the rights of transgender individuals, and businesses can collaborate with such organizations to ensure that their policies, products, and marketing campaigns are inclusive of the transgender community.

## 13. Local and Cultural Communities

Definition: These groups represent the unique cultural, ethnic, and geographical identities within a particular area. Involvement with these communities helps businesses tailor their offerings and marketing strategies to align with local values and traditions.

Example: McDonald's works with local cultural groups to adapt its menu offerings to fit local tastes and preferences in various international markets, such as offering vegetarian options in India.

Exercise. Identify and List of Who is Your Community;

1. **Local Residents**: They live and work in the community, so their input is essential.

2. **Community Leaders & Champions**: Religious, cultural, or grassroots leaders who represent larger groups.

3. **Local Businesses and Entrepreneurs**: like tourism, technology, farmers, services and retail.

4. **Youth Groups and Schools**: Young people bring fresh ideas and energy.

5. **Government agencies and business support:** e.g., those who support SMEs and economic development.

6. **Nonprofits and Advocacy Groups**: companies working on social or environmental issues e.g., youth centers, refugee centers, community centers.

7. **Underrepresented Groups**: Marginalised individuals or groups who often lack a voice in decision-making e.g., those with disabilities, unemployed, or immigrants.
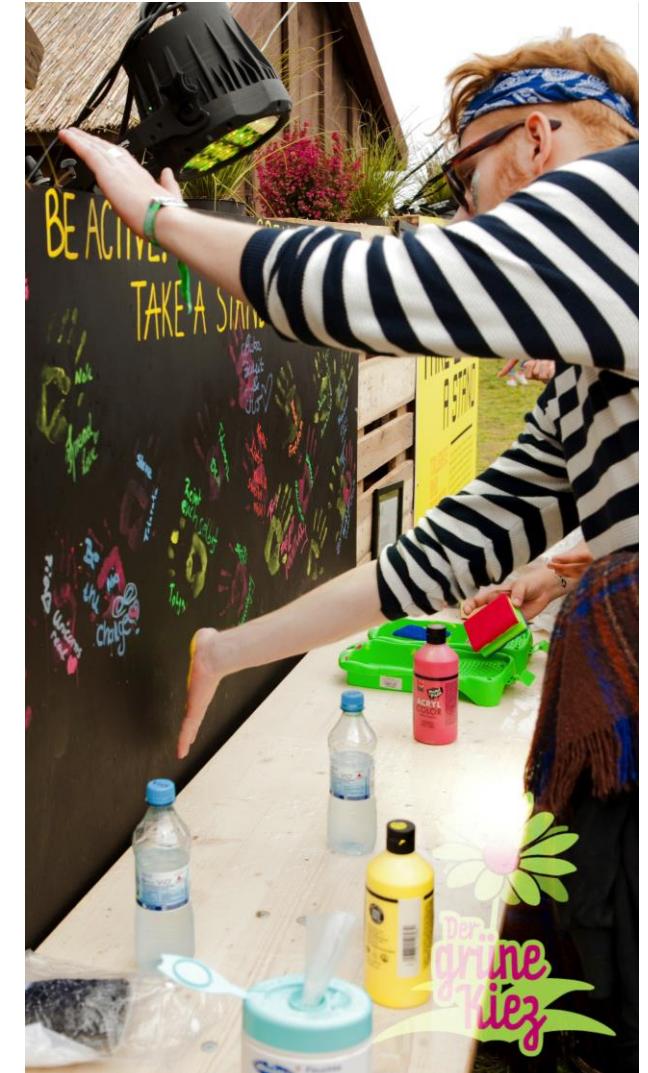
Understand the Four Layers to the Community Context

1. Residents, Culture, and History
2. Business, Government, and Nonprofit Sector(s) and Coalitions
3. Programs, Policies, Plans, & Systems
4. Resources, Environments, and Location

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What is? Community Context for SME Inclusive Engagement

Every community has its own culture, assets, history of achievement, and challenges on which to build.

When businesses fully recognise and understand these unique community settings, the funders, local leaders, and partnerships it helps direct strategies and tactics to better align with and leverage various dynamics at play.

Recognising, honoring, and accounting for community context matters at every stage of your community engagement

Ensuring this context is kept in mind ensures a more rooted approach for long-term sustainability.

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https://healthyplacesbydesign.org/community-context/

What is? Community Context for SME Inclusive Engagement

Imagine a community as a vibrant ecosystem of people, ideas, and resources, all interconnected and influencing one another.

For SMEs, the "community context" in inclusive engagement means understanding this ecosystem deeply—**acknowledging who lives in it, what their needs are, and how the SME's activities impact them.**

It's about Recognising that businesses don't operate in isolation but are part of a larger social and cultural fabric.

Community context is the backdrop against which businesses engage with people. It's understanding the people, the shared spaces, the history, the challenges, and the unique qualities that define a community. It's not just about seeing the community as a market for your product or service, but as a partner in mutual growth and well-being.

For example, a **café** in a small town might recognise that the town has a strong tradition of local art. By engaging with local artists to display and sell their work in the café, the business becomes part of the community's cultural identity.

Understanding the community context is the foundation of inclusive and impactful community engagement. It requires conversations, research, interaction and dialogue.

Foundation to Engagement: This foundational step helps build trust and meaningful connections, ensure informed decision-making, and lay the groundwork for meaningful collaboration and sustainable outcomes.

Tailor Strategies: By understanding the complexities of a community, you can tailor your strategies to address unique needs, leverage assets, and build meaningful connections.

Example Community Context: *The landscape is varied, includes urban and rural communities, eco-tourism hotspots, and regions with strong cultural identities. There is a lot of potential to integrate communities and businesses in unused spaces.*

Purpose: Community Context
For SMEs in Community Engagement

The goal is to build meaningful, two-way relationships. When SMEs understand the context of their community:

❖ They can create **initiatives that align** with the community's values and needs.

❖ They become **trusted partners**, not just businesses.

❖ They help **enable empowerment** by addressing gaps or challenges in the community.

In the next section we focus on 4 Key Layers to Community Context

For instance, if your SME is in a **low-income area**, providing skill-building workshops or offering discounts for students might address specific community needs, showing that you care and are invested in their success.

Purpose: Community Context For SME Community Engagement

To help an SME understand and define their objectives for inclusive community engagement, it's essential to break down each of the four main layers and explore how they relate to community dynamics.

1. Residents, Culture, and History **Layer 1**

2. Business, Government, and Nonprofit Sector(s) and Coalitions **Layer 2**

3. Programs, Policies, Plans, & Systems **Layer 3**

4. Resources, Environments, and Location **Layer 4**

- **Communities** are rich with traditions of civic engagement, visible in neighborhood associations, youth councils, congregations, and various forms of participation. Acknowledging these deep-rooted histories strengthens collaboration and builds trust.

- **Culture and history** play a significant role in understanding opportunities for (and sometimes resistance to) partnership and community engagement. They should inform preparation efforts, especially relationship building and designing inclusive strategies and programs.

- **Inclusivity angle:** Communities with a history of social and structural injustices such as racism, classism, and other "isms" may require a more intentional, transparent, reciprocal, and action-oriented process in order to build the relationships, mutual understanding, and trust that is necessary for success.

SMEs need to focus first on this layer to lay the foundation by building authentic, respectful connections with residents based on understanding their, culture, traditions, and historical context. The SME must prioritize learning about the community's social fabric, values, and challenges to tailor their engagement efforts appropriately.

Create Culturally Relevant Programs: Design programs that resonate with community values, such as celebrating local traditions or offering solutions to challenges (e.g., food insecurity, employment).

Community Mapping: Conduct surveys, have a dialogue, focus groups, or interviews with residents to identify their needs, challenges, and expectations. Include vulnerable or marginalised groups.

Cultural Research: Learn about local traditions, languages, and history. Attend community events or consult with local historians and cultural leaders to gain insight into historical and cultural influences.

Analyze Community Dynamics: Identify issues like social isolation, income disparities, and access to resources, especially in winter climates or other geographic considerations. recognise patterns like seasonal engagement or cultural resistance to certain types of partnerships.

02 Community Context: Business, Government, and Nonprofit Sector(s) and Coalitions Layer 2

- **Business leaders** have a keen understanding of economic and inclusive opportunities that may result from a more inclusive community and can often contribute financial and in-kind resources.

- Longtime **local leaders and government officials** have considerable control and influence over community resources and policy-making processes and can be trusted, powerful allies and champions. They can also be sources of mistrust and resistance to change in a community, so it is advised to carefully navigate and invest in relationship building

- Active **nonprofit and service agencies** typically serve vulnerable populations. They have a deep connection to vulnerable populations, serving as powerful and effective advocates, have frequent direct contact with residents and civic groups, and are capable of bringing new grants and complementary resources for inclusive initiatives.

- Likewise, **appointed advisory boards** and community coalitions bring essential work, they can offer their networks, knowledge, and diverse perspectives.

This layer helps SMEs secure financial and in-kind support from government and businesses sectors e.g., grants, sponsorships and volunteer initiatives. SMEs need to focus on formal systems, organizations, and stakeholders that influence the community's opportunities, policies, and resources. Understanding these entities helps the SME identify potential partners and barriers.

Co-create with Community Partnerships: Create collaborations with nonprofits and local coalitions to co-create programs that amplify impact and share resources.

Stakeholder Mapping: Identify and engage with local government officials, business leaders, nonprofit organizations, and coalitions that have an interest in community development. Attend public meetings or forums to stay informed about local policies, grants, and opportunities.

Collaborative Partnerships: Look for ways to partner with local nonprofits, government initiatives, or businesses with aligned interests. For example, a local chamber of commerce, unemployment departments, or cultural organizations could provide resources or co-host events.

Policy and Advocacy: Stay informed about policies that impact your community (e.g., employment policies and economic development plans). Engage in advocacy to help shape policies that support inclusive and equitable community development.

03 Community Context: Programs, Policies, Plans, & Systems Layer 3

- **Local policies and plans** can either enable or hinder healthier, more inclusive communities. Engaging community members in policy discussions ensures that these frameworks support equitable access to resources and opportunities.

- **Existing programs** provide a valuable foundation for advocacy efforts, helping to shape supportive policies and build momentum for more inclusive, health-focused community environments.

- Engaging communities in shaping **local and regional systems**—such as criminal justice, education, transportation, healthcare, housing, parks/recreation, and food systems— promotes inclusivity by addressing root causes of exclusivity. Through collaborative decision-making and equitable access to resources, communities can create integrated, comprehensive, and sustainable solutions that reflect diverse voices and needs.

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03 How? Programs, Policies, Plans, & Systems Layer 3

This layer covers the existing frameworks, plans, and systems that are in place to address community needs. SMEs need to assess how these structures operate and how they can align their initiatives with or enhance existing systems.

Collaborate with Existing Systems: Work within or alongside existing frameworks to enhance or amplify community goals. This could include contributing to local health and wellness programs or educational workshops. If current policies don't fully support inclusivity, work with stakeholders to advocate for policy changes that benefit underrepresented groups.

Policy Review: Study existing local government policies, community integration or inclusivity plans, or social services to understand their goals and shortcomings. Review documents like community development plans or annual reports from local government and nonprofits.

Community Programs Inventory: Identify and evaluate local programs that support incusion, health, education, social services, or cultural preservation. Understand where the gaps are and how your SME can complement or enhance these efforts.

Evaluate Barriers to Access: Consider systemic barriers that may prevent certain groups from accessing services (e.g., language barriers, or lack of outreach in underserved communities).

Resources, Environments, and Location

- **Existing resources** may be used to strategically leveraged to secure financial and in-kind support and investments from local foundations, corporations, governments, and other key stakeholders which, in turn, can complement and accelerate inclusive community engagement and positive change efforts.

- **Built and natural environments** present valuable opportunities and can be barriers to inclusive community engagement. It is important for SMEs to recognise how the different environments in their communities can promote or hinder inclusive communities

- **Geographic location** plays a crucial and unique role in shaping inclusive communities. Different environments offer their own unique opportunities and challenges for achieving goals. For example, a community with a winter climate will require different strategies than one in a temperate climate. A cafe could offer warm, local foods e.g., 'Soup Sunday' or 'Warm Up Wednesday', ensuring that vulnerable groups, such as the elderly or low-income families, have access to nutritious food during harsh weather.

04 How? Resources, Environments, and Location **Layer 4**

This layer deals with the physical and environmental aspects of the community, including geographic location, infrastructure, and natural resources. An SME should understand the environmental factors that influence how the community interacts with resources and services.

Address Access Issues & Implement Sustainable Practices: Implement solutions to overcome physical accessibility barriers especially for those with a disability or living in a remote location. Consider environmental sustainability in your projects (e.g., energy-efficient design, using local or eco-friendly products in fundraising events) to align with broader community goals.

Geographic Analysis: Assess the community's geographic challenges and opportunities (e.g., If a cafe is located in a rural village with limited public transport access, they might partner with local ride-sharing companies to offer discounts or offer a shuttle service to ensure community members from more remote areas can reach them easily.

04 How? Resources, Environments, and Location **Layer 4**

Resource Mapping: Identify key resources available in the community, such as local food sources, community spaces, or transportation options. Recognise areas where resources are scarce and may require additional support or innovation.

Example; a cafe can prioritize sourcing ingredients from local farms or food producers to not only support the local economy but also ensure freshness and sustainability. This might include offering dishes that use seasonal, locally grown produce, promoting a "farm-to-table" approach. It could collaborate with local community centers or businesses to host events such as cooking classes or small cultural performances, further embedding themselves in the fabric of the community.

Environmental Design: Consider how the physical environment can impact inclusivity—whether that means ensuring wheelchair access, creating welcoming spaces for all, or offering transportation to those who are geographically isolated.

Example; Create a welcoming, comfortable environment with adjustable lighting, diverse seating options, and clear, simple signage to accommodate people with different needs, such as those with visual impairments or mobility challenges.

How to Integrate all Four Layers

By approaching inclusive community engagement through these layered perspectives, an SME can design and implement strategies that are holistic, adaptable, and responsive to the diverse needs of the community.

Data Collection & Community Engagement: Start by listening—engage directly with residents, local organizations, and government bodies to understand needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Partnership Development: Build relationships with stakeholders from business, government, nonprofits, and community coalitions to align efforts, share resources, and co-create impactful programs.

Program Design & Adaptation: Develop programs that reflect the needs identified in each layer, focusing on inclusivity and removing barriers. These programs should be flexible enough to adapt to the community's dynamic needs.

Monitoring & Feedback Loops: Implement feedback mechanisms to continuously assess the effectiveness of your initiatives and adjust as needed to stay aligned with community goals and priorities.

What Makes a Community Context – Unfold the Layers to…
Integrate with Company Goals & Values to Create Shared Value
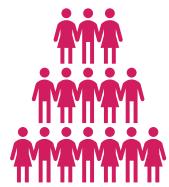
Discover the Layers		Shared Value
	People *Who makes up the community?* This includes different demographics, such as age groups, cultures, and underrepresented groups.	❖ A **clothing shop** might notice a large immigrant population and create products celebrating their cultural heritage.
	Needs and Challenges *What are the key issues people face?* These could be economic struggles, a lack of resources, or limited opportunities.	❖ A **tech SME** might identify a digital literacy gap and offer free IT workshops for seniors.
	Strengths and Assets *What makes the community unique?* This could include traditions, talents, or local resources.	❖ A **bakery** might partner with local farmers to use fresh, seasonal ingredients, strengthening the local economy.

What Makes a Community Context – Unfold the Layers to…
Integrate with Company Goals & Values to Create Shared Value

Discover the Layers	Shared Value
Spaces and Structures *What physical, green or digital spaces bring people together?* These include schools, community centres, parks, markets, and online forums.	❖ An SME could **sponsor events** at a local park or use social media to engage people in community conversations.
Culture and History *What stories and traditions shape the community's identity?* These could include famous monuments, myths, traditions or famous people.	❖ A business in a **historic neighborhood** might create events that celebrate local heritage or people, such as walking tours or storytelling nights.

What Community Context is NOT

Exclusive: It's not about engaging only with certain groups that benefit your business. Inclusive engagement means reaching out to all parts of the community, especially marginalised or overlooked groups.

❖ **One-Sided**: It's not about **imposing your vision** on the community or deciding what's best for them without consultation.

Example, an SME deciding to donate unused goods **without first asking** if the community needs them could come across as tone-deaf.

❖ **A Quick Fix:** Inclusive community engagement is **not a short-term PR** stunt. Real engagement takes time, effort, and consistency.

Example, Throwing one charity event and then **never interacting** with the community again does not build trust or long-term relationships.

❖ **Marketing Strategy:** Its core purpose is to create mutual value, not just to sell more products.

Example, Sponsoring a local sports team **solely for visibility**, without any genuine connection to the community, misses the point.

Strategies to Build Trust and Connection

For SMEs, building trust and connection with their community and stakeholders is essential for long-term success. Trust enables customer loyalty, strengthens partnerships, and enhances business credibility. By actively engaging with their community through open communication, inclusivity, and participative collaboration, SMEs can create meaningful relationships that drive both social impact and business growth. Prioritizing trust and connection not only supports sustainable growth but also ensures SMEs remain valuable contributors to

Strategies to Build Trust and Connection

Successful strategies to build trust and connection so that communities feel confident they can engage and participate are important. The needs and interests of community members should inform the design of programs and plans; this investment is invaluable; it will reflect the interests of many and solve real challenges that exist within the project context.

1. Create a Safe Space: Create a space where people can build trust with each other, contribute to shared knowledge, identify tangible short and long-term goals, and provide a space to assess and reassess the effectiveness of a program or project.

2. Flexibility is Essential: To achieve goals, flexibility for the scope of engagement to move beyond the life cycle of a program or project should be considered. For example, be prepared for a wider community of stakeholders to join later and participate. This could delay e.g., getting planning or approval for an event.
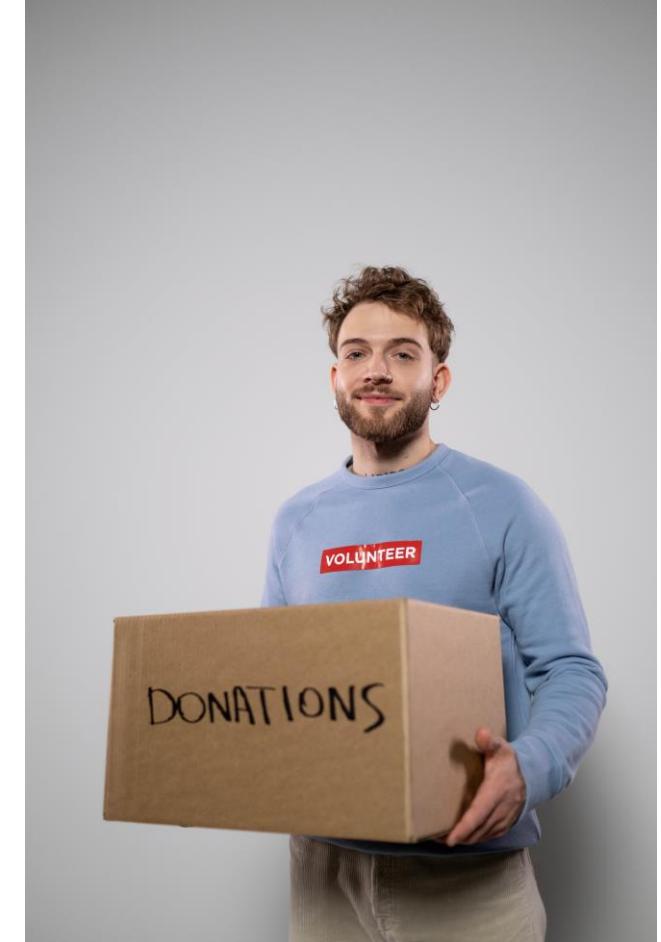
3. **Encourage Participation:** Invite community stakeholders to join your existing efforts but participate in their offerings in some way or branch out and activate their own. People will feel ownership and empowered to explore additional ideas, interests and needs that will enhance your event and the community. This generates more connectivity between you and community members while creating a deeper understanding of shared value amongst what and who is involved.

4. **Check the Quality of the Engagement:** After each engagement, check the quality of the engagement and attend to the shortcomings; the calibre of feedback data will improve. People will feel more confident and their opinions will be valued. They will provide more information and trust you more, as a result will give you a much richer understanding of community needs.

5. **Pride of Community and Place:** Is about enabling a strong connection and sense of belonging among individuals to their local area. It celebrates shared identity, heritage, and the unique qualities of a community, encouraging care and stewardship. For SMEs, nurturing this pride enhances community loyalty, boosts local engagement, and creates a supportive environment for initiatives. This can be achieved by highlighting local stories, supporting cultural events, and collaborating with residents to showcase the area's strengths.

Exercise: Prepare Framework for Community Context

Before engaging, a comprehensive understanding of the community context and needs, set up your framework or the things you need to do to develop a plan before you start researching and taking to the community:
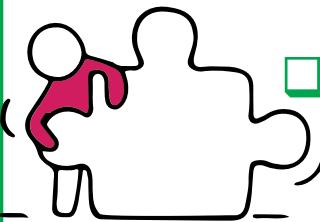
- ☐ **Define Your Scope**: Are you engaging with local residents, small businesses, artisans, schools, or a mix?
- ☐ **Formal Research:** To understand needs, challenges and priorities and the impact of your business. Look at local history and use surveys, public records, and social media to gather information.
- ☐ **Cultural and Social Analysis**: Ensure the engagement process aligned with the community's values and context.
- ☐ **Stakeholder Mapping:** Identify key players, key individuals and groups who could influence or benefit from the initiatives.

Exercise: Prepare Framework for Community Context

- **Direct Engagement:** Spend time talking to community members informally—host a local coffee hour or attend existing community events.

- **Observation:** Walk through neighborhoods to observe daily life and understand how the business might fit into and serve the community.

☐ **Talk to Key People:** Meet local individuals, diverse groups, leaders, youth groups, or companies to have a conversation and reveal insights.

☐ **Understand Demographics:** Consider factors like age, cultural background, employment, and interests.

☐ **Research existing networks:** Identify community companies, cultural groups, and influencers.

The next exercise goes into more detail how to understand, explore and research the key areas.

Exercise. Start Researching and Talking
The Foundation of Inclusive and Impactful Engagement

This exercise will help guide your community context research and provide the foundation for inclusive and impactful community engagement. "Understand the Community Landscape" will help you understand the importance of gaining a deep understanding of the local context before initiating engagement efforts. You will need to;

❖ **Assess Unique Characteristics** such as the social, cultural, geographical, historical, economic, and environmental factors that shape the community. SMEs should actively learn about their community's unique characteristics.

❖ **Identify key stakeholders,** understanding their needs, priorities, and challenges, and Recognising existing resources and dynamics. Combining informal research (e.g., conversations with local residents and key stakeholders) with formal methods (e.g., analyzing local data or reports).

- ❖ **Explore the community's history, and assets.** Communities are shaped by a complex web of social, cultural, economic, safety, environmental, and historical factors. Conducting qualitative community research sheds light on the lived experiences of residents, helping identify unique needs, assets, and challenges. It helps you understand the nuances so you can create shared values and equitable solutions. Research enables your engagement impact to discover how to be inclusive and impactful.

- ❖ **Understand social factors** such as culture, race, ethnicity, education level, language fluency, physical abilities, and environmental conditions all play a role in shaping perspectives.

Example, a **grocery store in Spain** may discover through research that a significant portion of the local population values access to organic produce but struggles with affordability.

- ❖ **Research transportation, environment and accessibility influences.** Look at linkages to transport for the community or accessibility barriers which could affect how people interact with your business and proposed programs.

Example, a **farm in France** planning a community-supported agriculture program could map transportation barriers to ensure equitable delivery options.

Exercise. Start Talking to the Locals!

Next start talking to the locals, marginalised and diverse communities.

Use this People Centered Approach: This ensures you are being collaborative, transparent and authentic to work alongside community stakeholders to identify issues and co-create solutions. Gather narratives from community members to understand the impact of the social, built and economic environments.

Hear the stories, the traditions, what works, what hasn't worked and learn why. Ask them their challenges, frustrations, hopes and dreams. Be specific talk about important factors like unemployment, crime, socioeconomic status, education, and health, determine their challenges and engagement needs.

Exercise. Start Talking to the Locals!

Initial Engagement: Visit public spaces, such as local businesses, community centers, cafes, or other gathering spots. If appropriate, organize direct outreach like door-to-door visits or pop-up events to introduce the company and your inclusive community engagement mission.

Introduce the Company: Start the conversation by introducing yourself, explaining why you're in the area, and sharing details about the company's inclusive community engagement goals. Allow the community member to share their own story and experiences with the area.

Let the community lead the conversation: Guide the conversation highlighting key areas that you think need to be addressed e.g., unemployment, youth support, intercultural exchange. But listen you might be surprised that there are other priorities.

Exercise. Start Talking to the Locals!

Document Insights: After each conversation or observation, make sure to document key findings, challenges, and potential opportunities for your inclusive community engagement program. These notes will help shape the development of your inclusive engagement initiatives.

Reflect and Report Back: Gather the team together to share observations and insights. Reflect on the feedback gathered from the community, identifying common themes and specific needs. Use this information to guide the next steps in the development of inclusive projects that are responsive to the community's needs and inclusive in nature.
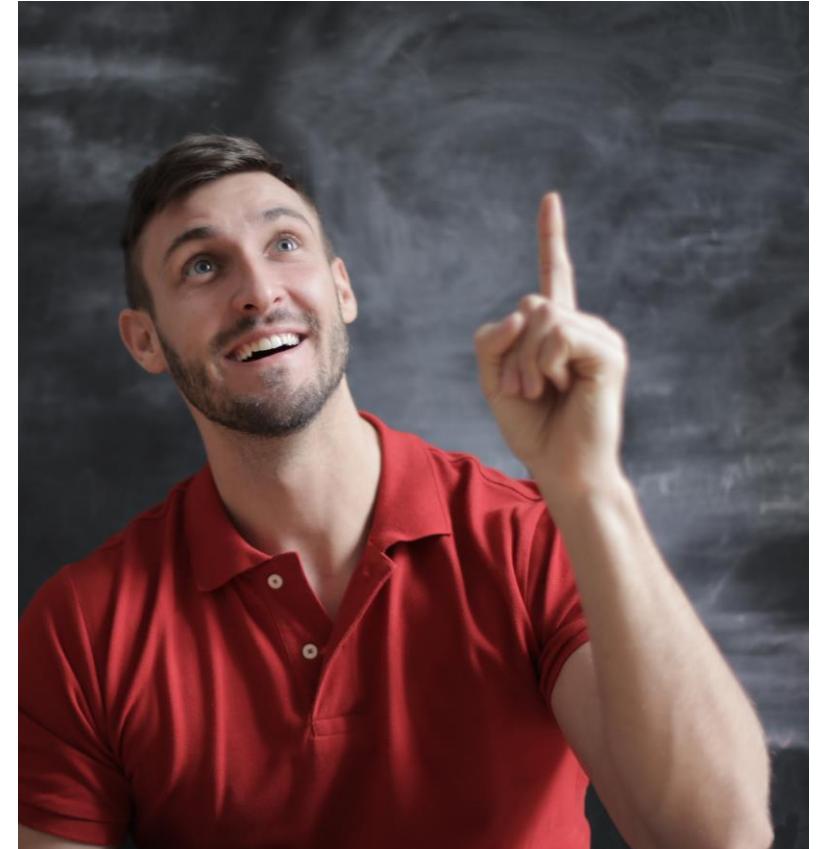
Exercise. Start Talking to the Locals!

Informal Focus Groups: A **restaurant in Italy** could host focus groups with locals to explore how seasonal dishes can reflect the community's culinary traditions.

Walkaround Tours: Walk with your community from different backgrounds to explore and observe daily life, take photos, and identify community dynamics. This might uncover underutilized spaces and spark new ideas for inclusive initiatives.

Example: An **IT consultancy in the Netherlands** could study how infrastructure projects have affected digital access in underserved neighborhoods.

Informal Workshops: A **craft business in Denmark** might interview artisans about how urban development has influenced their trade, using these insights to host relevant workshops.
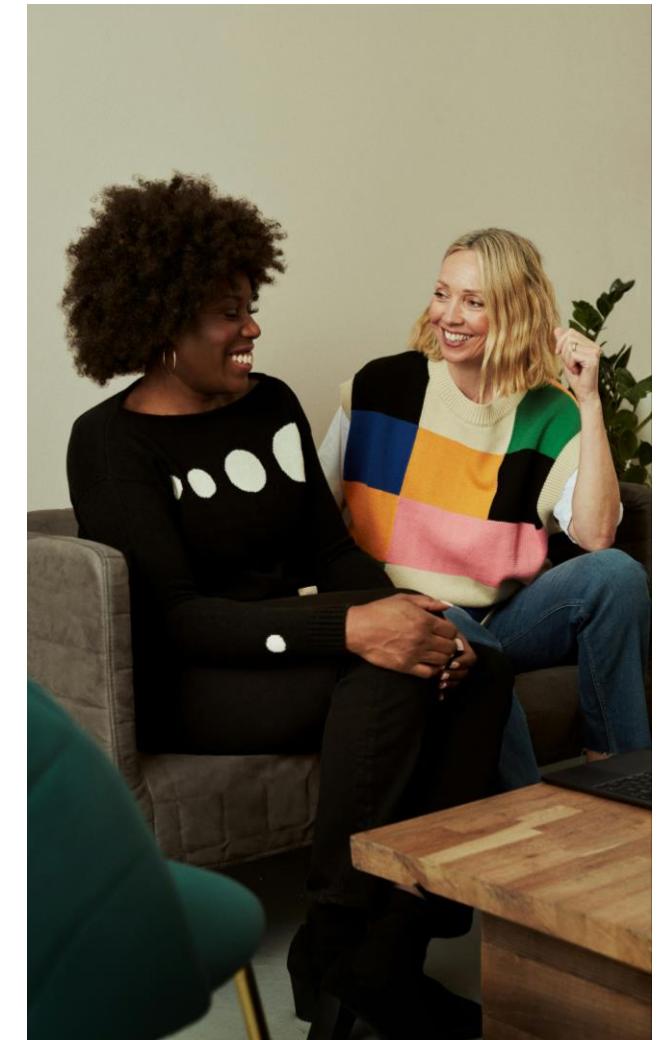
Questions to Engage in Open Dialogue with Communities

Engage in Open Dialogue: Have open-ended conversations. Rather than structured interviews, let the conversation flow naturally. Questions could include:

- "What challenges do you feel the community is facing right now?"

- "What local issues would you like to see addressed?"

- "What do you value most about this neighborhood?"

- "How could local businesses, including our company, contribute to the wellbeing of the community?"

Five People Known for Community and Belonging

1. **Mahatma Gandhi** – For leading a peaceful revolution rooted in the power of community and collective action.
2. **Martin Luther King Jr.** – For advocating for civil rights and unity through community-driven movements.
3. **Nelson Mandela** – For uniting a divided nation through a shared vision of equality and belonging.
4. **Mother Teresa** – For dedicating her life to building a compassionate global community through acts of service.
5. **Desmond Tutu** – For promoting reconciliation and community healing in post-apartheid South Africa.

Source

Learning Outcomes

What You Have Learned at the end of this module.

1. **Clear Understanding of Who Makes Up My Community** – I can now identify the different groups that make up my community and understand how to engage with them effectively.

2. **Ability to Analyze Community Context** – I can recognise the four layers of community context (residents, sectors, policies, and resources) and integrate them with my business values.

3. **Recognition of Trust-Building Strategies** – I understand key strategies that build trust, such as creating an inclusive space, adapting to community needs, and encouraging active participation.

4. **Awareness of the Impact of Community Engagement** – I can explain how meaningful engagement strengthens social connections, supports local economies, and promotes long-term collaboration.

5. **Application of Inclusive Engagement Practices** – I can implement effective engagement techniques that promote shared value, respect diverse perspectives, and enhance community well-being.

Well Done!

Module 6 Part 2

Now Complete Module 6 Part 3: Ensuring Inclusive Engagement through Shared Value and Community Empowerment.

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