



Module 6 (Part 4)

Inclusive Community Engagement for SMEs

Part 4: Prepare for an Effective Community Engagement Framework: A Step-by-Step Guide

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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!



YOU ARE HERE

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

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.



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.

Section 1

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

Part 1

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

Section 2

Understand & Engage Your Community: Foundations for Inclusive Impact.

Part 2

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

Section 3

Ensuring Inclusive Engagement through Shared Value and Community Empowerment.

Part 3

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

Section 4

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

Part 4

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

Section 5

Create a Community Engagement Framework & Develop a Collaborative Action Plan

Part 5

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



M6:Part 4

Step 1: Define Your Community Engagement Purpose & Objective

Clarify the purpose and objectives of your community engagement, consider your 'why' reflect on your core values and align to engagement activities. Learn how a clear purpose aligns all stakeholders and guides your process toward impactful results.

Step 2: Set Up Your Community Engagement Team (Internal & External)

Learn how to assemble effective community engagement teams (internal staff) and (external stakeholders) and develop an inclusive plan with the fundamental actions necessary for effective engagement.

01

Step 1: Define Your Community Engagement Purpose & Objective

02

Step 2: Set Up Your Community Engagement Team (Internal & External)

03

Step 3: Refine Your Engagement Approaches

04

Step 4: Start Initiating Inclusive Community Engagement

05

Step 5: Develop Engagement Framework and Action Plan

Exercise: Identify Your Purpose

Exercise: Identify Your Impact & Improve Engagement

Case Study: VivaGreen, Cleaning Products, Ireland

M6:Part 4

Step 3: Refine Your Engagement Approaches

Tailor engagement strategies to the community's needs, using community driven methods like surveys or workshops. Adapt approaches to suit your community.

Step 4: Start Initiating Inclusive Community Engagement. Understand how to start and manage inclusive conversations with your community ensuring every voice is heard and understood.

Exercise: Refine Community Engagement Approach

Learning Objectives

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

- Understand the **purpose and objectives** behind community engagement.
- Learn how to assemble and manage both **internal and external engagement teams**.
- Identify and **refine engagement strategies** for diverse community contexts.
- **Learn to initiate** and maintain inclusive community engagement practices.

Develop A Community Engagement Framework

Developing a **Community Engagement Framework** helps SMEs **build stronger relationships, drive social impact, and contribute to long-term community development**. By following these steps, businesses can ensure their engagement is **purpose-driven, inclusive, and sustainable**.



Develop A Community Engagement Framework

A **Community Engagement Framework** is essential for businesses to ensure their engagement efforts are **strategic, consistent, and impactful**. Without a structured approach, community interactions can become fragmented, reactive, or lack long-term sustainability. A well-designed framework helps businesses **define clear goals, identify key stakeholders, choose appropriate engagement methods, and measure success** over time.

By developing a framework, businesses can **align their engagement activities with their values and business objectives**, ensuring that their efforts are not just beneficial to the community but also contribute to brand trust, customer loyalty, and social impact. It also enables businesses to be **proactive and adaptive**, responding effectively to community needs while enabling **stronger, more meaningful relationships** with stakeholders. A solid framework provides a roadmap for sustainable, inclusive, and purpose-driven engagement.

Develop A Community Engagement Framework

The purpose of this section is for SMEs to create a community-inclusive engagement framework to build meaningful connections with their local community, ensuring that all individuals feel valued and heard. The **Community Engagement Framework** provides a **structured roadmap** that helps SMEs achieve the goals outlined in your section. It transforms intentions into **actionable strategies**, ensuring engagement is **inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable**.

- ❖ **Strategic Alignment:** A framework ensures that SMEs build meaningful connections by providing clear goals, engagement methods, and evaluation strategies, reinforcing inclusivity and long-term impact.
- ❖ **Inclusivity and Collaboration:** By embracing diversity and empowering marginalised groups, SMEs can design engagement strategies that enable participation from all community members, ensuring that everyone feels valued and heard.

Develop A Community Engagement Framework

- ❖ **Community-Driven Approach:** A framework enables businesses to address local needs effectively by guiding them in identifying stakeholders, challenges, and collaborative opportunities, ensuring initiatives resonate with the values of the people they serve.
- ❖ **Sustainability and Impact:** With structured engagement, businesses can create transparent, long-term community-driven projects that strengthen local economies, enhance social impact, and ensure the success of both the business and the community.



Develop A Community Engagement Framework

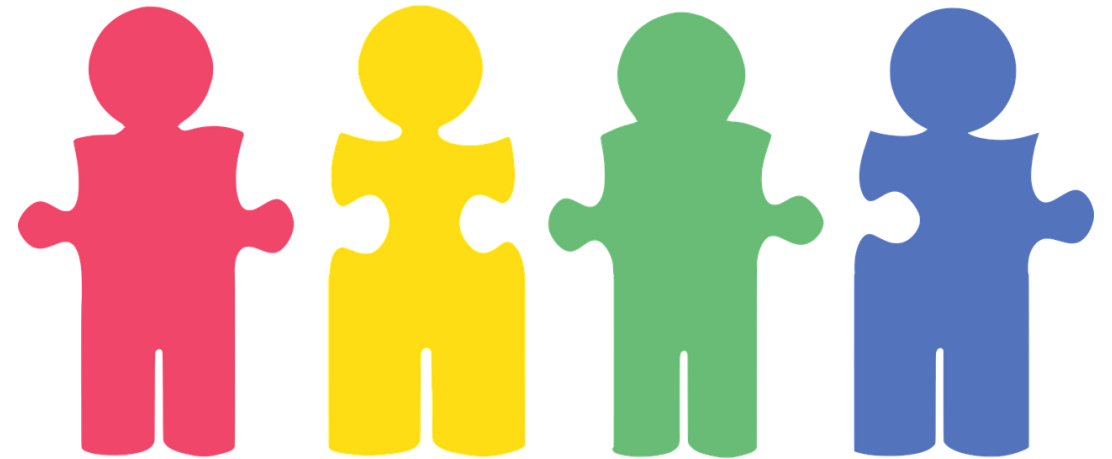
Step 1: Define Your Community Engagement Purpose & Objective

Step 2: Set Up Your Community Engagement Team (Internal & External)

Step 3: Refine Your Engagement Approaches

Step 4: Start Initiating Inclusive Community Engagement

Step 5: Develop Engagement Framework and Action Plan



Step 1

Define Your Community Engagement Purpose & Objective



Free templates you can use for small business community engagement.

<https://www.adobe.com/uk/express/learn/blog/small-business-community-engagement>

An SME needs a clear purpose and objective to guide all engagement efforts, ensuring they are inclusive, align with business values and community needs. This helps SMEs move beyond one-off initiatives and create long-term, impactful relationships with their communities. This is where you identify what you want to achieve with your engagement—ultimately creating shared value, inclusivity, and addressing social issues.

Find Your Engagement Purpose & Objective

For businesses, defining a clear **community engagement purpose and objective** ensures that their efforts are meaningful, strategic, and aligned with both their values and community needs. A well-defined purpose helps businesses move beyond one-time outreach efforts and create **long-term, impactful relationships** with stakeholders. It provides direction, ensuring that engagement activities contribute to **social impact, brand trust, and business growth** rather than being seen as disconnected or superficial.

Having a clear objective also helps businesses **measure success, allocate resources effectively, and adapt their approach** based on community feedback. When businesses understand why they are engaging and what they hope to achieve—whether it's building stronger partnerships, supporting local development, or promoting inclusivity—they can create **authentic, sustainable, and mutually beneficial engagement strategies** that truly resonate with the communities they serve.

Find Your Engagement Purpose & Objective

Create a Strong Base for Active and Sustained Community Engagement

Purpose

The purpose is to build meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships with the communities an SME operates in. Inclusive engagement enables trust, supports sustainable development, and creates a positive social and economic impact. The objective is to create a collaborative environment where the SME and the community work together to address shared challenges, harness opportunities, and improve well-being.

Find Your SME Purpose and Objectives

- ❖ **Purpose** refers to the core reason the SME exists beyond profit-making. It's the business's contribution to society and its stakeholders.
- ❖ **Objectives** are specific, measurable actions the SME takes to fulfill its purpose. They are short- to medium-term goals that drive business strategies.

Sample Purpose

"We want to work with our community in a way that inspires people to get involved and feel proud of where they live. We believe in creating opportunities for everyone to pitch in and be part of something bigger, whether that's improving the local area, supporting each other, or building something sustainable for the future. We're not just running a business here; we're trying to build a sense of connection and shared purpose where everyone feels they have a stake in making our community thrive."



Align Your **Purpose** with Community Engagement

Purpose refers to the core reason the SME exists beyond profit-making. It's the business's contribution to society and its stakeholders.

- ❖ **Reflect on Core Values:** What principles guide the business? For example, sustainability, innovation, or community empowerment.
- ❖ **Consider the "Why":** Why was the SME started? What problems does it aim to solve or what opportunities does it address?
- ❖ **Assess Impact Areas:** How does the SME positively influence customers, employees, and communities? For instance, does it promote local craftsmanship or provide eco-friendly solutions?
- ❖ **Engage Stakeholders:** Gather insights from employees, customers, and partners to understand what they value about the SME's role.

Align Your Objectives with Community Engagement

Objectives are specific, measurable actions the SME takes to fulfill its purpose. They are short- to medium-term goals that drive business strategies.

- **Link to Purpose:** Align objectives with the SME's overarching purpose. For example, if the purpose is to promote sustainability, an objective could be to source 80% of materials locally by 2026.
- **Understand Stakeholder Needs:** What do customers, employees, and the community expect? Objectives should address these needs, like offering training programs for local workers or providing products that meet ethical standards.
- **Analyze Market Position:** Identify the SME's strengths, opportunities, and differentiators. Objectives should leverage these areas to achieve growth and impact.
- **Set SMART Goals:** Ensure objectives are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

Align Your Purpose and Objectives For Community Engagement

Example	Purpose	Objective
Sustainable Fashion SME	To create eco-friendly, ethically made clothing that supports local artisans.	❖ Increase the percentage of products made with recycled materials by 50% within two years.
Tech Start-Up	To empower small businesses with affordable digital tools.	❖ Launch a free app feature to help small local retailers track inventory sustainably
Health and Wellness SME	To promote mental and physical well-being in urban communities.	❖ Host monthly workshops on mindfulness and yoga for underserved communities.

Purpose of Community Engagement for SMEs

For an SME, engaging with local communities serves several important purposes:

Engagement	Purpose	Example
Build Trust and Relationships	To establish goodwill and create a positive image for your SME. Engagement helps your business become a trusted part of the community, strengthening your reputation and loyalty	Partnering with local organizations to support a cleanup drive shows your commitment to shared community goals.
Create Mutual Benefits	To ensure your business supports the community while the community, in turn, supports your business. Engagement isn't just about helping the community—it's about aligning your goals with theirs so both parties' benefit.	An eco-friendly product shop sourcing materials from local artisans not only boosts local businesses but also gains unique, authentic products for its customers.

Engagement	Purpose	Example
Understand Local Needs	<p>Ensure your SME aligns its products, services, and operations with the community's values. By engaging, you gain valuable insights into the community's challenges and priorities, allowing you to tailor your business practices to address them.</p>	<p>A grocery store learns the community needs more affordable organic produce, so they collaborate with local farmers to address this need.</p>
Enhance Social Impact	<p>To ensure your SME is a positive force for change and aligned with global sustainability trends. Engagement helps your SME contribute to solving social, environmental, or cultural challenges, making a lasting impact.</p>	<p>A tourism business creating eco-friendly tours supports environmental conservation while attracting like-minded travelers.</p>
Strengthening Local Economies	<p>To build a resilient, supportive network around your business. Supporting local initiatives, employing community members, or sourcing locally boosts the local economy and creates a stronger business ecosystem.</p>	<p>A coffee shop collaborating with local bakers and artists not only diversifies offerings but also supports multiple small businesses.</p>

Exercise: Identify Your Purpose

Ensures your community engagement actions and strategies align with your foundational principles, creating authenticity.



❑ Reflect on Core Values:

Core values are the guiding principles that shape how a business operates and interacts with the world. Reflecting on them ensures you remain authentic and consistent in your actions. This exercise helps define the SME's unique identity and purpose.

What principles/core values guide the business? For example, sustainability, innovation, or community empowerment, education, supporting diversity and inclusion.

❑ Consider Your "Why"

Understanding the “why” uncovers the purpose behind the business. It differentiates the SME from competitors by highlighting its deeper mission beyond making a profit. Inspires possible stakeholders hearing your story and aligns daily operations with your meaningful purpose.

- Why did you start your business?
- What problems does it aim to solve?
- What opportunities does it address?

Core Values	Example	Aligned Community Engagement Actions
<p>Sustainability Sustainability is a core value, every decision—from sourcing materials to marketing— so community engagement should align with sustainability</p>	<p>A café might prioritize sustainability.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Host community events about composting or reducing food waste. ❖ Offer incentives (e.g., discounts) to customers who bring reusable cups. ❖ Collaborate with local farms and involve community members in seasonal food workshops.
<p>Education You believe everyone should have the right to education. You believe in empowering people with the skills necessary to progress in life.</p>	<p>A business might value education and believe in empowering young people with skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Offer free workshops or training sessions to unemployed youth, teaching them practical skills like coding, customer service, or carpentry. ❖ Create internship programs to give young people real-world experience in the industry. ❖ Partner with local schools to provide career talks or mentoring.

Purpose	Example	Aligned Community Engagement Actions
<p>Note: Keep it simple: Focus on one or two small community engagement initiatives to start. For example, a café can run "community coffee mornings" where a portion of sales supports a local cause.</p>		
<p>Provide Healthy Food in Food Deserts</p>	<p>A small grocer started because the owner saw that their neighborhood lacked access to fresh produce.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Partner with local farmers to create affordable weekly produce boxes. ❖ Set up mobile food markets to reach underserved areas. ❖ Run "healthy cooking on a budget" classes to empower families to eat well.
<p>Support Local Artisans</p>	<p>A boutique began to give artisans a platform to sell handmade goods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Host artisan pop-up markets where makers can showcase their work. ❖ Provide free workshops for locals on how to start small craft businesses. ❖ Create a space in the shop to showcase community-created products.

Exercise: Identify Your Impact & Improve Engagement



□ Assess Areas of Impact

Assessing impact areas identifies how your business contributes value to its ecosystem. It ensures you are aware of your social, economic, and environmental footprint and how to improve it, which is essential for long-term sustainability and stakeholder loyalty. You get to pinpoint strengths, identify opportunities for improvement. Highlight your role in addressing community challenges and reinforce our accountability and responsibility to your stakeholders and community.

- How does the SME positively influence customers, employees, and communities?
- For instance, does it promote local craftsmanship or provide eco-friendly solutions?

□ Engage Stakeholders:

Stakeholder feedback ensures your purpose aligns with the expectations and needs of the people you serve and impact. Engaging stakeholders builds strong relationships, provides informed decision making and you become more resilient and adaptable. This encourages collaboration, shared ownership, uncovers blind spots and overlooked opportunities. It ensures you maintain trust by demonstrating you care and listen.

- Gather insights from employees, customers, and partners to understand what they value about your role.

Impact	Example	Aligned Community Engagement Actions
<p>Note Real-life impact doesn't have to cost a lot of time and resources: Small, tangible actions like free training sessions or local collaborations create trust and goodwill.</p>		
<p>Improving Employment Opportunities</p>	<p>A manufacturing business employs people in the local area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Run job fairs targeting people who may face barriers to employment (e.g., young parents, people with disabilities). ❖ Set up apprenticeships to help people learn on the job. ❖ Provide transportation support for employees from rural areas.
<p>Building Cultural Connections</p>	<p>A tourism company values preserving local heritage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Offer community-led tours where local residents act as guides, sharing their own stories. ❖ Donate part of profits to preserve historical sites in the community. ❖ Organize cultural events or festivals that celebrate and educate about local traditions.

Engage Stakeholders	Example	Aligned Community Engagement Actions
<p>Note: Business engagement is worth the time and effort: Engaging inclusively brings innovative growth, attracts and retains loyal stakeholders and customers, better staff retention, and creates positive community buzz.</p>		
<p>Listening to Local Needs</p>	<p>A small retailer notices declining foot traffic in their neighborhood.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Host a town hall meeting to ask residents what they want from local businesses. ❖ Use the feedback to offer products that meet specific community needs (e.g., school supplies or affordable household goods). ❖ Create loyalty programs or community discounts to help neighbors save money.
<p>Collaborating with Local Organizations</p>	<p>A gym wants to connect with the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Partner with local charities to provide free fitness sessions for underprivileged groups. ❖ Collaborate with schools to run after-school sports programs for kids. ❖ Host "pay what you can" fitness days to include people of all income levels.

Case Study

VivaGreen, Biodegradable Cleaning Products, Ireland

Is a world leader in the research and development of biodegradable, chemical-free, plastic-free, and circular economy products and is committed to producing environmentally friendly products of the highest quality.

‘For us, as a business, CSR has been game changing. It has helped us grow turnover by 100% in the last 2 years and +65% of turnover is exported.

So our products are not only helping Ireland but helping the world. Increased turnover in markets across the world as consumers and businesses switch to more sustainable products and practices.

VivaGreen®



<https://vivagreengroup.com/about-us/>

Social and Community Impact

Actively engage with local communities, partners, and companies across Youth, Education, and Research initiatives.

At VivaGreen, we are dedicated to inspiring the next generation to embrace and promote the green movement. Our involvement in local communities and support for local projects helps amplify this message.

Through research conducted with customers, communities, and environmental experts, we identify key challenges, driving the development of innovative, eco-friendly solutions.



Engaging with Marketplace & Partners

Engage with responsible local community partners and companies.

In our experience, customers expect companies to adopt a more responsible approach in how they operate. We do this by ethical and local sourcing and working with the local Marketplace. It has become a key element in our CSR and marketing strategy so we can maintain existing customers and attract new business.

Through **Ethical Sourcing** VivaGreen products are made from ethically sourced ingredients that are from natural origins and sustainable sources. For future product development, we continue to keep watching and listening to what the market requires as more companies (and individuals) continue to adjust their thinking, purchasing and practices to be more considerate of the world.



Step 2

Set Up Your Community Engagement Team (Internal & External)



A dedicated team ensures that community engagement is **well-coordinated and sustainable**. By involving both internal team members and external community representatives, SMEs can **build trust and credibility** in their engagement efforts. This is where you assign roles and responsibilities for employees, partners, and community leaders to oversee engagement activities.

Set Up Your Community Engagement Team (Internal)

Community engagement is a practice of understanding and acting on residents' values, concerns, and aspirations. It ensures that community members' ideas drive intentional projects, initiatives, services, and systems development while simultaneously building trust. It refers to the process of building meaningful, two-way relationships between your SME and the local community. It involves actively interacting, listening, and collaborating with community members to create mutual value, understanding, and trust. Engagement helps us to understand the needs and aspirations of people which you intend to support or help.

Set Up Company Engagement Team (internal): Form a team of facilitators and observers who can connect with the community and stakeholders authentically and respectfully. Make sure they can engage with communities using a sensitive and empathetic approach, creating opportunities for local stakeholders to voice their concerns and ideas. Train the team in cultural sensitivity, active listening, and inclusive communication practices.

Set Out What You Want them To Achieve According to Your Objectives (Examples)

Prioritise your objectives based on the purpose of your engagement.

Remember small businesses have the potential to offer so much support, from providing jobs to improving the local economy. Ensure that your objectives reflect shared value for both your business and the community.



- Research **Community Context** to get a detailed understanding of cultural, economic, and social dynamics informed engagement. This will ensure that initiatives are relevant.
- Enhance community **pride and identity** by organizing cultural events.
- Create economic opportunities** through employment and internships.
- Create a stronger support base for **youth community projects** that are sustainable and inclusive. By providing sustainable support solutions that reflect young diverse needs and perspectives.
- Develop a **strategic community engagement plan** to increase visibility and credibility of inclusive community initiatives.

Key Actions: SME Community Engagement Team



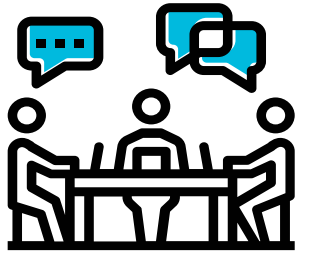
Understand the Community Context by doing community research and needs assessment: Conduct surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather insights into the community's needs and concerns. Research the community's history, culture, demographics, and challenges to ensure that engagement efforts are tailored to their specific context.



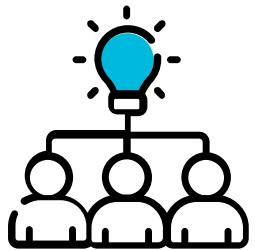
Stakeholder Mapping and Relationship Building: Identify and engage key stakeholders such as local residents, business owners, non-profits, and government entities. Their objective is to ensure long-term relationships with these stakeholders to encourage collaboration, shared goals, and mutual support.



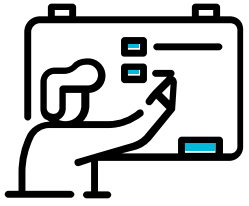
Program Design and Implementation: Develop the inclusive community programs, initiatives, and events that address local needs (e.g., supporting local artisans, organise cultural exchange workshops, or providing job training). Ensure these programs are accessible to all community members, including those with different abilities, backgrounds, or socioeconomic statuses.



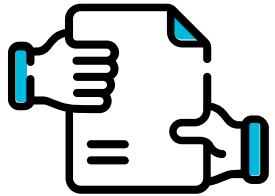
Promotion of Inclusivity: Organize community events, town halls, or forums where all community members can voice their opinions and participate in decision-making. Use inclusive communication methods (e.g., multilingual materials, accessible venues) to ensure that everyone can get involved.



Collaboration with Local Organizations and Government: Partner with local non-profits, government agencies, schools, and businesses to maximize the impact of community initiatives. Collaborate on projects that support social, economic, and environmental goals, such as sustainability or job creation.



Feedback Collection and Impact Assessment: Regularly gather feedback from the community to understand how the business is impacting them and whether their needs are being met. Use surveys, interviews, and social media to assess the effectiveness of community programs and make adjustments when needed.



Communication and Transparency: Maintain open, transparent communication with the community regarding SME's goals, initiatives, and impacts. Use multiple communication channels (e.g., social media, meetings) to share progress and updates.



Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution: Address any concerns or conflicts that may arise within the community due to the SME's activities, whether related to environmental impact, social concerns, or misunderstandings. Work proactively to resolve issues and maintain a positive relationship between the SME and the community.



Volunteerism and Employee Involvement: Encourage SME employees to participate in community service and volunteering efforts. Organize team-building volunteer events or donate resources to community causes, creating a strong sense of social responsibility within the company.

Set Up Your Community Engagement Team (External)

Set Up Community Engagement Team (external). You will also need a separate community engagement team (external). You should include representation of all community members and stakeholders, e.g., local residents, community leaders, business owners, and other key stakeholders who are affected by or have an interest in the company's CSR/Inclusion initiatives.

Meaningful Invitations: Personally reach out to individuals and organizations, emphasizing the value of their input. Seek individuals who bring diverse perspectives and experiences. Balance recruitment between those already engaged and newcomers to the process. Ensure fair compensation and transparent communication about expectations and commitments.

Create a Diverse Community Advisory Team: Ensure the team reflects the community's diversity, including gender, age, ethnicity, and economic status. For example, an engineering SME in Germany might involve apprentices, migrant workers, and women in technical roles. Facilitate workshops to build relationships within the advisory team and establish shared goals

Step 3

Refine Your Engagement Approaches

Different communities require different levels of engagement. Identifying the right approach ensures businesses are meeting communities where they are, enabling collaboration and empowerment.

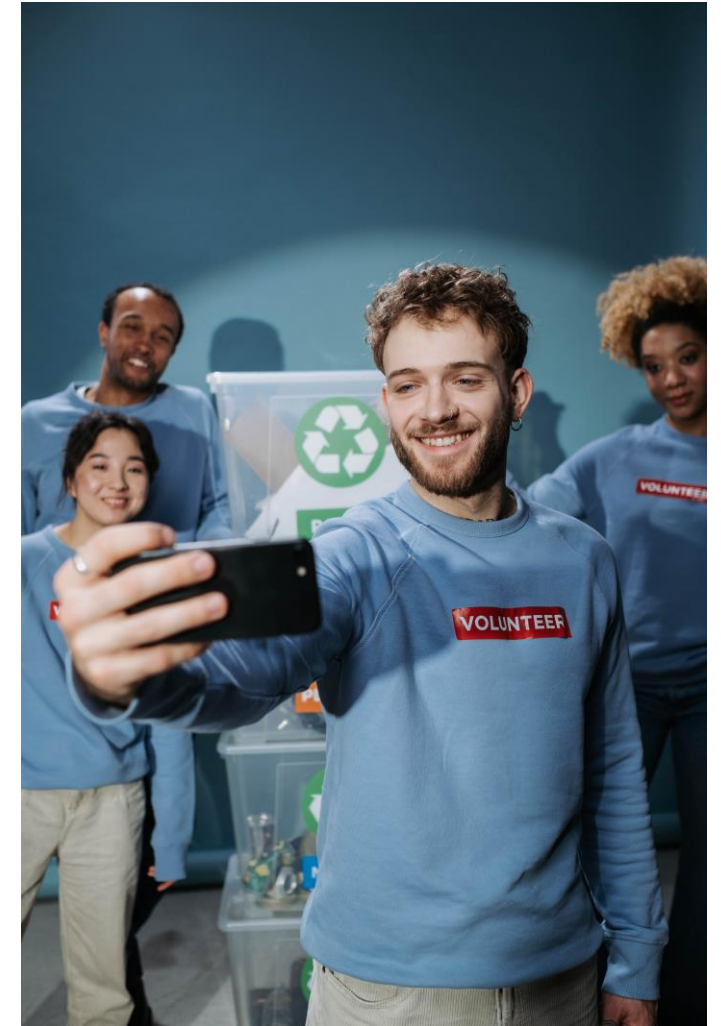


1. **Community-focused** (consult and involve)
2. **Community-centered** (collaborate with minimal involvement)
3. **Community-led** (empowered)
4. **Community-empowered** (full ownership empowerment)

Importance of Using Different Approaches to SME Engagement

For SMEs in Europe, adopting diverse approaches to community engagement is crucial for addressing the unique needs and dynamics of their local environments. A one-size-fits-all strategy may not resonate with different communities or stakeholders, as each has distinct cultural, social, and economic characteristics.

By utilizing varied engagement methods—such as public consultations, partnerships with local organizations, digital engagement platforms, or hosting events—SMEs can form deeper connections, reach wider audiences, and adapt to evolving community expectations. For instance, a technology SME in Germany might use online surveys to gather community feedback, while an artisanal business in Italy might focus on hosting open workshops to connect with locals.



Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Europe play a vital role in enabling inclusive and sustainable community development. This means their approach to community engagement involves creating meaningful partnerships with local stakeholders, promoting shared growth, and addressing the unique needs of the communities they operate within.

SMEs often utilise initiatives like supporting local employment, engaging in co-designed community projects, and sponsoring cultural or educational programs.

For example, a family-owned SME in Austria might collaborate with local schools to offer apprenticeships or internships, ensuring a skilled future workforce while strengthening ties with the community.



Communities can be engaged at a range of levels: from providing advice and co-designing the process to undertaking aspects of the engagement and delivering projects to meet the outcomes. No matter what level of engagement you decide on, systems should always be designed for long-term sustainability, ensuring they can reliably meet current and future needs of the population.

<https://www.sbcguidance.org/understand/community-engagement>



Engagement Approach

Community Centered and community-led

Community-led engagement is a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered by you. It is a powerful approach because it emphasises you want to build genuine, long-lasting relationships built on trust.

As Jeff Bezos famously said, 'Your brand is what other people say about you when you're not in the room.'

[Harvard Business Review](#)



<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/behind-closed-doors-ultimate-guide-how-smes-can-leverage-ma-vila-wa9ef/>

Inclusive Community-Led Strategy for SMEs

An inclusive, community-centred engagement strategy prioritises community engagement, enabling active, loyal and engaged leaders and collaborators to be at the centre to shape initiatives that drive shared community value. Unlike approaches where the SME dictates outcomes, this strategy empowers the community to take the lead in identifying needs, defining goals, and co-creating solutions. This approach acknowledges that communities are experts in their own experiences, and SMEs play a supportive role by providing resources, expertise, and platforms for collaboration. The focus is on building sustainable relationships, enhancing equity, and creating opportunities for communities to thrive on their own terms.

The purpose is to provide an approach where the role of the SMEs is a supporter or partner, not a leader in inclusive projects. SMEs help create and get involved in the ecosystems where collaboration, resilience, and shared ownership drives sustainable development.



Purpose for the Community

- ❖ **Increased Agency:** Communities lead the process, ensuring initiatives align with their aspirations.
- ❖ **Capacity Building:** Projects focus on skills development, knowledge sharing, and sustainable practices.
- ❖ **Stronger Social Ties:** Collaborative efforts unite diverse groups around shared goals.

Purpose for SMEs

- ❖ **Deeper Trust:** Engaging on community terms builds credibility and strengthens relationships.
- ❖ **Shared Value:** Co-created initiatives create benefits for both the SME and the community.
- ❖ **Resilient Partnerships:** Community-led efforts enable loyalty and mutual support during challenges.

Purpose for Both

- ❖ **Empower Communities:** Shift decision-making power to the community to ensure relevance and authenticity.
- ❖ **Build Equity:** Builds inclusion by amplifying voices from diverse and marginalised groups.
- ❖ **Create Lasting Impact:** Co-develop solutions that address systemic challenges and deliver long-term benefits.

Community-Centered Engagement Strategy

Listen and Learn with Humility

- **Start with Dialogue:** Conduct listening sessions where community members share their needs, goals, and challenges.
- **Recognise Local Expertise:** Treat community members as equal partners and leaders in the process.
- **Engage Underrepresented Groups:** Ensure inclusivity by involving marginalised voices.

Empower Communities to Lead

- **Facilitate Co-Design:** Collaborate with community leaders to co-create initiatives that reflect local priorities.
- **Transfer Ownership:** Design projects where communities manage resources, make decisions, and track outcomes.
- **Invest in Capacity Building:** Provide training, tools, or mentorship to enhance local leadership and skills.

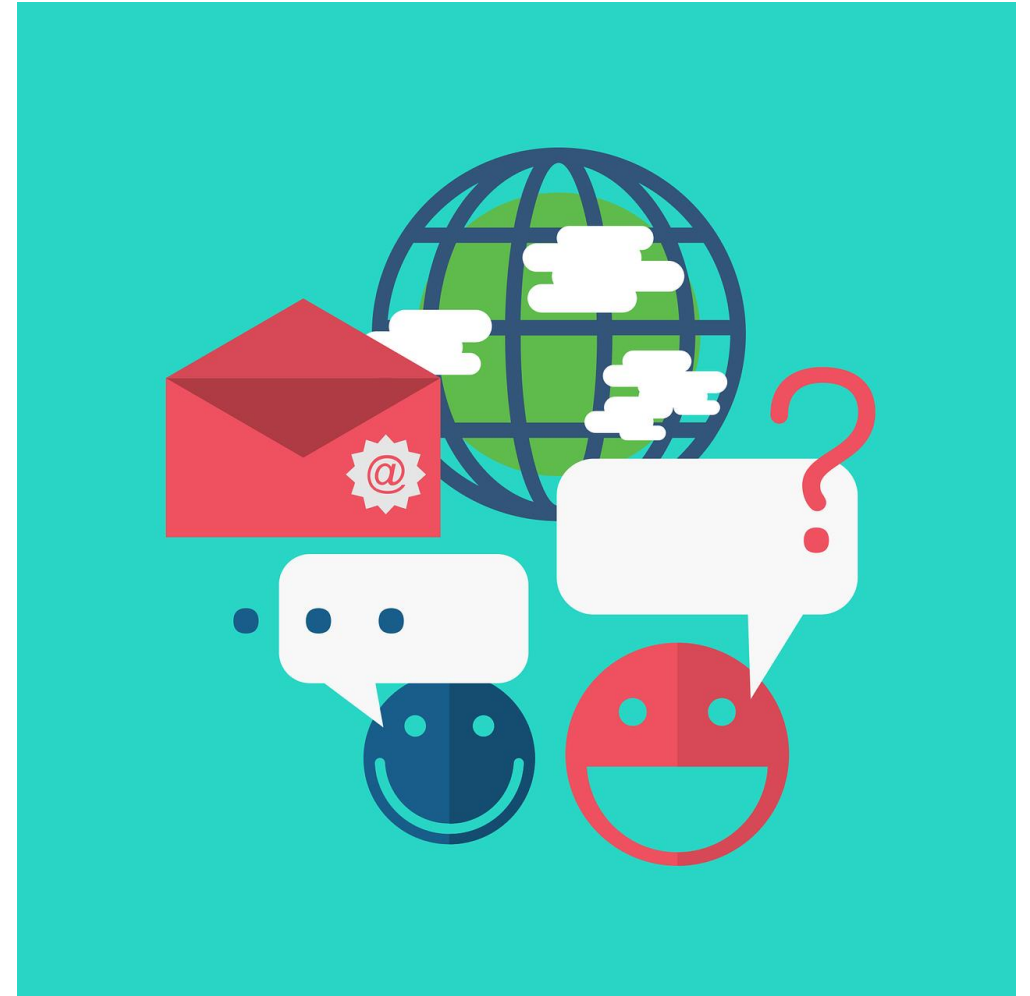


Community-Centered Engagement Strategy

Collaborate for Shared Value

- **Strengthen Networks:** Connect community groups with other stakeholders to amplify impact.
- **Support Collective Goals:** Align SME contributions (e.g., funding, expertise, or resources) with community-led objectives.
- **Celebrate and Promote Success:** Highlight community achievements through events or media to inspire continued collaboration.

Discussed in more detail in the first approach.



4 Approaches to SME Community Engagement

- 1. Community-focused (consult and involve):** This approach involves informing and mobilizing the community to participate in addressing short-term issues. **Consider** using community meetings, surveys, and door-to-door visits to involve community members.
- 2. Community-centered (collaborate with minimal involvement):** In this approach, the community is consulted and involved in improving access to services and basic elements of their neighborhood. **Consider** using focus groups, community hubs, and community events to engage with the community.
- 3. Community-led (empowered):** This approach involves collaboration with community leaders to enable priority setting and decision-making by the community. **Consider** using workshops, design sessions, and leadership training to empower community leaders.
- 4. Community-empowered (full ownership empowerment):** This approach involves fully mobilizing community "assets." **Consider** using community resources, such as volunteers and community organizations, to drive engagement and ownership.

Inform and Mobilise

- ❖ **Inform and mobilise** the community to participate in addressing immediate short-term concerns. Address short-term issues by raising awareness and rallying resources, requiring strong external support. SMEs can start by raising awareness and encouraging community participation to address immediate concerns. This requires strong external support and proactive communication.
- ❖ **Example**, a **local café** could organize a neighborhood cleanup drive, providing supplies and refreshments to participants while partnering with a municipal waste management team.
- ❖ **Example**, a **small manufacturing business** could distribute flyers or host information sessions about reducing energy usage, with guidance from local environmental organizations.



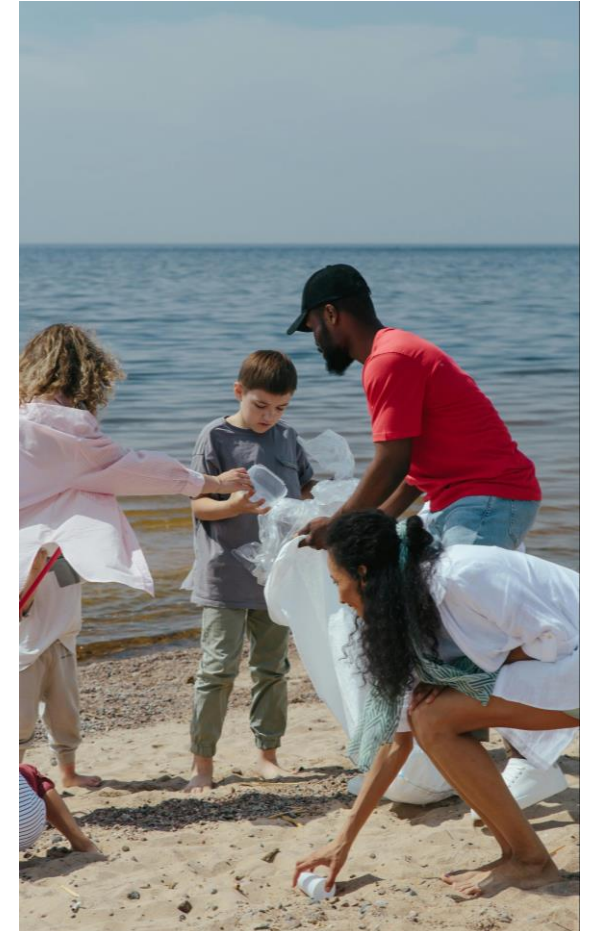
01

Community Focused Approach (Consult & Involve)

This approach emphasizes informing and motivating the community to actively participate in addressing both short- and long-term challenges. The goal is to engage the community directly in solving immediate concerns while ensuring their needs and preferences are considered in the process.

This method focuses on consulting and involving the community to improve the delivery of services, supports, and programs, often with some external support. SMEs can consult with the community, gather feedback (e.g., through surveys, focus groups, or community events), and actively involve them in shaping solutions. This approach may require external support to facilitate the process.

Engagement Methods: Public consultations, surveys, door-to-door visits, and community meetings. For example, feedback gathered through a survey could be used to help design programs that address food accessibility issues in the neighborhood.



Examples: Community Focused Approach (Consult & Involve)

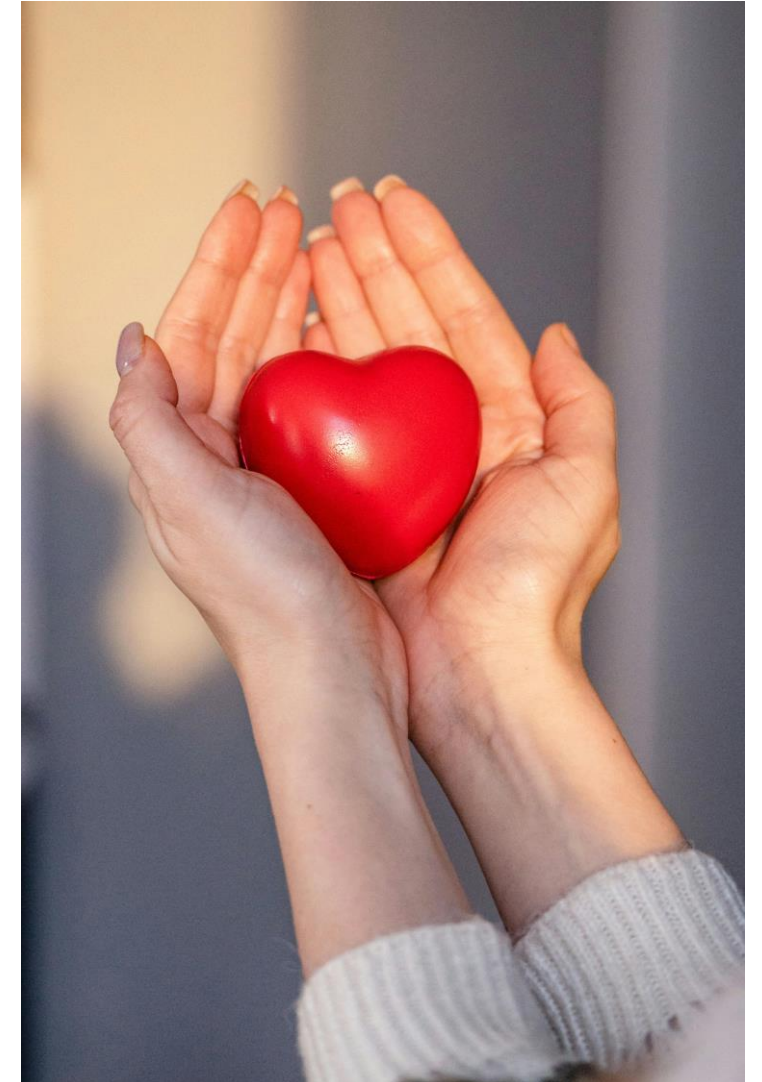
- ❖ **Example**, a **Technology SME** in Germany looking to introduce a new product in a local area could use **online surveys** and **community meetings** to gather feedback from residents about their needs, concerns, and the potential impacts of the product. This could inform product development and ensure the product aligns with the local market's needs.
- ❖ **Example**, an **Artisanal Business** in a small Italian town could host **community feedback sessions** to understand what local residents want from the business. Surveys could be conducted at local markets, followed by a meeting to discuss how to incorporate these preferences into the bakery's offerings.
- ❖ **Example**, a **small IT firm** could hold workshops for community members to identify their digital skill gaps and then co-design a training program with input from participants.
- ❖ **Example**, a **boutique hotel** could survey locals to understand cultural tourism opportunities and then collaborate on designing tour packages that highlight community traditions.

02

Community-Centered Approach (Collaborate with Minimal Involvement)

This approach focuses on actively consulting with the community to enhance access to services, amenities, and basic needs, with an emphasis on medium-term improvements. It aims to address infrastructure gaps and provide better access to essential resources while promoting collaboration between businesses and community members. The focus is on gathering insights, identifying needs, and co-developing solutions that align with community priorities.

Engagement Methods: Focus groups, community hubs, and community events. For example, businesses can take the insights and ideas gathered from **focus groups** and **workshops** and collaborate with community leaders to inform **decision-making processes** that drive local improvements, such as creating new communal spaces or programs that support local artisans.



Examples: Community-Centered (Collaborate with Minimal Involvement)

- ❖ **Example**, a **Technology SME** in Germany specializing in sustainable solutions could partner with a local community hub to host workshops where residents can learn about and discuss environmental challenges and potential tech-driven solutions. This engagement enables mutual understanding and helps design products that better serve the community.
- ❖ **Example**, an **Artisanal Business** in a small Italian town might create a community event where they invite residents to participate in product-making workshops, such as crafting furniture from recycled materials. This event provides a platform to learn about the benefits of sustainability and the importance of local craftsmanship, strengthening community ties.
- ❖ **Example**, a **local artisan shop** could collaborate with nearby craftspeople to host a fair, showcasing their talents while collectively deciding the event's focus and logistics.
- ❖ **Example**, a **fitness studio** could work with community groups to establish health priorities, such as hosting free yoga sessions in local parks or offering classes tailored to specific needs, like senior citizens.



03

Community-Led Approach (Empowerment)

Here, the focus shifts to collaborating with community leaders to enable the community to take charge of its development by setting priorities with community leaders to set priorities and make decisions. The goal is to build a community-driven model where local initiatives are self-sustaining and shaped by the people who are directly affected. The SME should provide leadership, local knowledge, and resource mobilization, to ensure long-term sustainability and community ownership.

Engagement Methods: Workshops, design sessions, and leadership training. A community-led approach naturally progresses into a community-empowered model as the knowledge and tools from the workshops and leadership training are used to harness local resources (e.g., volunteers, expertise) to fully drive initiatives. **For example**, local leaders might organize volunteer-led workshops to teach sustainable practices to the community.

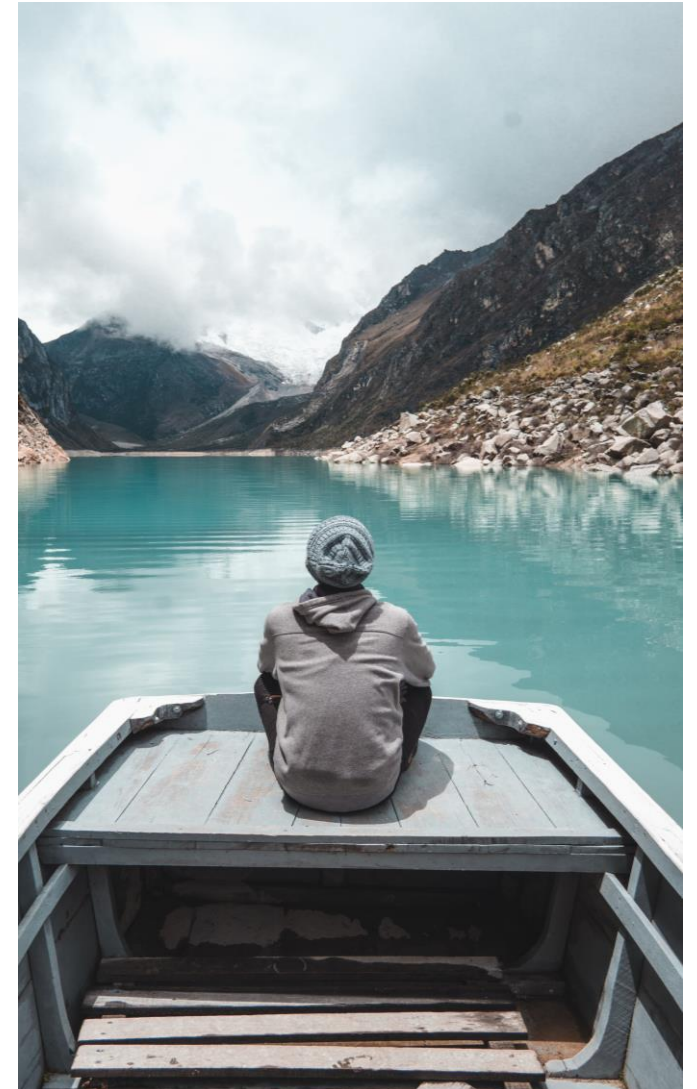


Examples: Community-Centered (Empowerment)

❖ Empower the Community for Long-term Sustainability

Empower the community to develop systems for self-governance, establish and set priorities, implement interventions, and develop sustainable mechanisms for development with partners, as part of a support network. SMEs can support the community in building self-governance systems, setting priorities, and implementing sustainable solutions in collaboration with partners.

- ❖ **Example**, a **small eco-tourism business** could mentor local guides, teaching them how to run sustainable tours independently, while providing initial support through marketing and training.
- ❖ **Example**, a **local grocer** could partner with farmers to set up a co-op where the community governs the sourcing and pricing of fresh produce, ensuring long-term food security and economic resilience.



04

Community-Led Approach (Full Ownership Empowerment)

In this final stage, the community is fully mobilized and uses its own resources to drive projects, ensuring that initiatives are community-led and self-sustaining. The focus is on addressing previously identified issues by utilizing local assets, networks, and expertise to take full ownership of their development. SMEs play a vital role in mentoring, providing resources, and partnering with the community to establish a robust support network for long-term success.

Engagement Methods: Leveraging community volunteers, community organizations, and peer-to-peer networks. A community-full ownership approach comes full circle by addressing issues raised in the community-focused phase. **For instance**, after conducting surveys or workshops, the community can take on the leadership role in carrying out initiatives, using its assets and resources to address the concerns raised.

Example, a **Technology SME in** Germany could partner with local volunteers to establish a community-led tech repair initiative, where community members teach each other how to fix and repurpose old electronics. This would create a circular economy model and build a sense of ownership and pride within the community.



Community-Led Approach (Empowerment for Full Ownership)

Example, a Technology SME in Germany could host leadership training sessions for local community leaders, helping them gain the skills needed to engage others in the ethical use of technology and its impact on the community. This can create a more inclusive decision-making process where community leaders actively shape future technological initiatives.

Example, an Artisanal cooperative could collaborate with local leaders to host design sessions, allowing the community to co-create a new product line based on traditional crafts, ensuring the products reflect local heritage and are developed in line with community values. SMES can share resources, create joint marketing campaigns so both can thrive together.



Inclusive Community Engagement Quick Checklist

- ❑ **Communication:** Enable open and inclusive communication within your community. **Do not** neglect the importance of empathy in communication and interactions.
- ❑ **Celebrate diversity** and embrace different perspectives. **Do not** ignore conflicts or misunderstandings within the community. **Avoid** overlooking the value of diversity and inclusion.
- ❑ **Commit and invest long-term** in inclusive community building through shared values. **Avoid** exclusive practices that alienate members.
- ❑ **Lead by example** in creating a sense of belonging. **Don't** underestimate the impact of leadership on community dynamics.





Exercise. Refine Community Engagement Approach

This exercise helps SMEs assess and develop their approach to inclusive community engagement by exploring different levels of involvement: **Community-focused, Community-centered, Community-led, and Community-empowered.**

Step 1: List their current community engagement activities (e.g., sponsorships, local events, partnerships).

Step 2: Identify key community stakeholders (e.g., residents, local businesses, nonprofits, local government). Map how each group is currently engaged and where gaps may exist.





Exercise. Refine Community Engagement Approach

Step 3: Break into small teams (or individual reflection) and brainstorm practical actions for improving engagement at each level:

- Community-focused:** How can you **better inform and involve** community members? (e.g., host a survey, attend town hall meetings)
- Community-centered:** How can you **collaborate more** effectively? (e.g., partner with local groups for an event)
- Community-led:** How can you **empower leaders?** (e.g., support training or mentorship programs)
- Community-empowered:** How can you **encourage full ownership?** (e.g., co-create a long-term project with local organizations)





Step 4

Start Initiating Inclusive Community Engagement

Taking action is key to **bringing your framework to life**. Start actively engaging with your community. Engage inclusively to ensure that all voices are heard, build stronger connections and social impact. If you are doing this for the first time you will start small to gather community feedback before you can start your inclusive efforts.

05

Initiate Community Engagement First Meeting (Keep it Informal)

The goal is to approach the community engagement as an opportunity for listening and learning, not just interviewing. The emphasis is on understanding the lived experiences of local residents and identifying how the company can best support the community's needs. This shows the community you want to enhance your local presence, shape their offerings to meet real inclusive needs,

- ❖ **Conduct activities** like neighborhood walking tours or visits to community hubs to talk.
- ❖ Focus on **casual conversations**, not structured interviews, to encourage openness and trust. Approach **community members** in familiar spaces, such as local markets, cafes, and community centers.
- ❖ Ask **open-ended questions** to learn about their experiences, needs, and aspirations:

Ask open-ended questions to learn about their experiences, needs, and aspirations:

“What do you value most about living here?”

“What challenges do you think the community is facing?”

“How can local businesses like ours support the community better?”

All Engagement Activities Must Be Inclusive

To ensure inclusive community engagement for an SME, tailored communication strategies must address language and accessibility barriers. Meetings should be scheduled at convenient times and locations for all groups, ensuring that everyone can participate. Building trust is key, and this is achieved through consistent communication and follow-up, helping to maintain strong relationships with community members.

- Frequent, transparent communication** about both progress and challenges.
- Regular updates** via newsletters, social media, and community bulletins.
- Acknowledge and **celebrate small victories** to maintain momentum and collective enthusiasm.
- Schedule **meetings at accessible times and locations**, ensuring inclusivity for all community members.
- Translate materials** into multiple languages as needed to ensure all voices are heard.
- Actively **seek input** through diverse channels, including online platforms, in-person meetings, and paper surveys.
- Adjust approaches** to accommodate underrepresented voices, such as marginalised or disabled individuals.

All Engagement Communication Must Be Inclusive

- ❖ **Transparency is key:** Explain clearly who you are, why you are engaging with them, and what the company hopes to achieve through its CSR/Inclusion activities. This openness builds trust and encourages active participation. Ensure that initiatives align with community priorities and cultural values.
- ❖ **Take a conversational, non-judgmental approach.** This is not about extracting information but about developing a relationship with the community.
- ❖ Understand that **not everyone will want to engage**, and that's perfectly acceptable. This process is as much about the community getting to know your company as it is about you getting to know them.
- ❖ **Be empathetic:** Use open empathetic communication. Acknowledge feelings, respond in a way that shows you understand and care. Listen with the intent to learn and collaborate, rather than dictate solutions.
- ❖ **Make sure everyone is heard:** Create inclusive opportunities that enable marginalised or underrepresented groups to interact.

Learning Outcomes

1. Clearly define the purpose and objectives of my business community engagement efforts.
2. Form and manage effective engagement teams with internal and external stakeholders.
3. Select and tailor engagement approaches that align with the community's needs.
4. Implement inclusive community led practices that empower diverse community members.



Well Done!

Module 6 Part 5

Part 5: Create a Community Engagement Framework & Develop a Collaborative Action Plan

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