



Action

There are eight key areas to help guide the Local Conversation. These are:

- Action
- Approach
- Context
- Governance
- Influence
- Involvement
- Leadership
- Relationships

This section looks at taking **action**. We consider:

1. What we mean by action
2. Why action is important in the Local Conversations programme
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. What you can do to support action, including some practical examples
6. A summary
7. Some helpful do's and don'ts
8. A final exercise

1. What we mean by action

Action, sometimes referred to as community action or social action, focuses on people coming together to improve their local area. It involves people giving their time for the good of their community, in a range of forms - from volunteering, to challenging structures and processes, to the creation of community-owned services.

It is about communities driving change based on their needs and priorities. In a Local Conversation therefore, action refers to everything that is happening under its umbrella to achieve its vision: from the smaller-scale recreational activities right through to taking collective action on the issues impacting the quality of people's lives locally.

2. Why action is important in the Local Conversations programme

The Local Conversations programme supports residents to act on issues in their local area, in ways that matter to them. Effective action can help bring about the change people want to see in their local community.

There are many different types of action that can be taken within a Local Conversation. The starting point is to bring local people together to discuss the issues that are important to them as a neighbourhood and work out the actions required to address them. There are a number of crucial steps to understanding how, when, and on what to take action, including getting to grips with the local context, getting residents involved, and defining your approach.

The types of action we would expect to see in a Local Conversation include:

- Working together to improve [social determinants of the community's health](#), for example developing or maintaining local green spaces, employability (CVs and interview prep) or skills development
- Campaigning and lobbying
- Making contacts, networking and developing partnerships with other organisations in order to achieve shared goals
- Allocating or spending money against residents' priorities
- Applying for funding

All of these create an environment where residents actively shape their neighbourhood and its wellbeing. The key thing is to ensure that listening to people moves on to action. See Section 5 below for ways to tackle the above, as well as the Involvement and Approach sections of this guidance.

There are clear links between a Local Conversation's plans for action and plans to influence. These are the two key ways to really make changes to the longer-term, deeper-rooted issues that cause health inequalities and lead to poorer health and shorter lives in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Influencing is about persuading or leveraging others in positions of power to bring about the changes you want to see, and has its own section in the Practice Guide. Action is more direct: things you can do, together.

Actions are different to activities. The activities residents want to do, and want to take place through the Local Conversation, are important. They are great ways to engage the community and to build deeper involvement. Often, they might take the place of activities that came before, or play an important role in developing skills: youth clubs, social activities, or English as a Second Language classes. Actions are more geared towards change - challenging the unequal access to power, money and resources that leads to health inequalities, harnessing the strength of collective control and community power, and looking to make a real difference to the quality of jobs and income locally, the local environment or public transport, local economy, housing, or education and skills.

Examples: taking action around food

Grow N22 is a community project in North London which transforms unlikely, disused and neglected spaces across Haringey into vibrant community gardens and food-growing spaces made for and by local people. *Grow N22* started as a hobby, but has quickly grown into a Community Interest Company (CIC).

Good Food Oxford has a mission to connect the people of Oxford through food. They established a partnership with *FriendLey's*. *FriendLey's* is a local community group aiming to reduce isolation and loneliness in the local community for older people. The group meets every Wednesday morning for tea and cake, games and talks from local Oxford organisations. This provides a space for social connection, food and warmth.

See www.edenprojectcommunities.com/inspiring-stories

Exercise - the actions we take

Create a table with four columns. Put the examples of actions above in the left hand column and label the three additional columns: past, present, and future.

Ask the Steering Group to discuss each action and think about what they have done (past), what they are doing (present) and any planned activities (future).

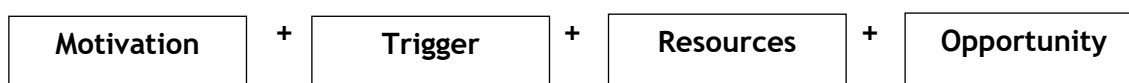
- Which of the past and present actions were or are successful and why?
- Are there any actions which were not successful? Why not?
- Are there any actions that you have not tried?
- Are there additional actions to add to the future column, based on what has worked in the past?
- Are there other forms of action that you think are important but which are not listed above? What are these? What more could you do?

3. Some theory and approaches

It is important to support communities to come together and organise effectively so that they can get their views heard and exert influence on decisions that affect them. In [DIY Community Action](#), Richardson characterises community action as: “informal groups of people, acting on a voluntary basis, working together to solve problems by taking actions themselves, and with others.”

What stimulates action?

It is suggested in [Pathways Through Participation](#) that people become active when they have:



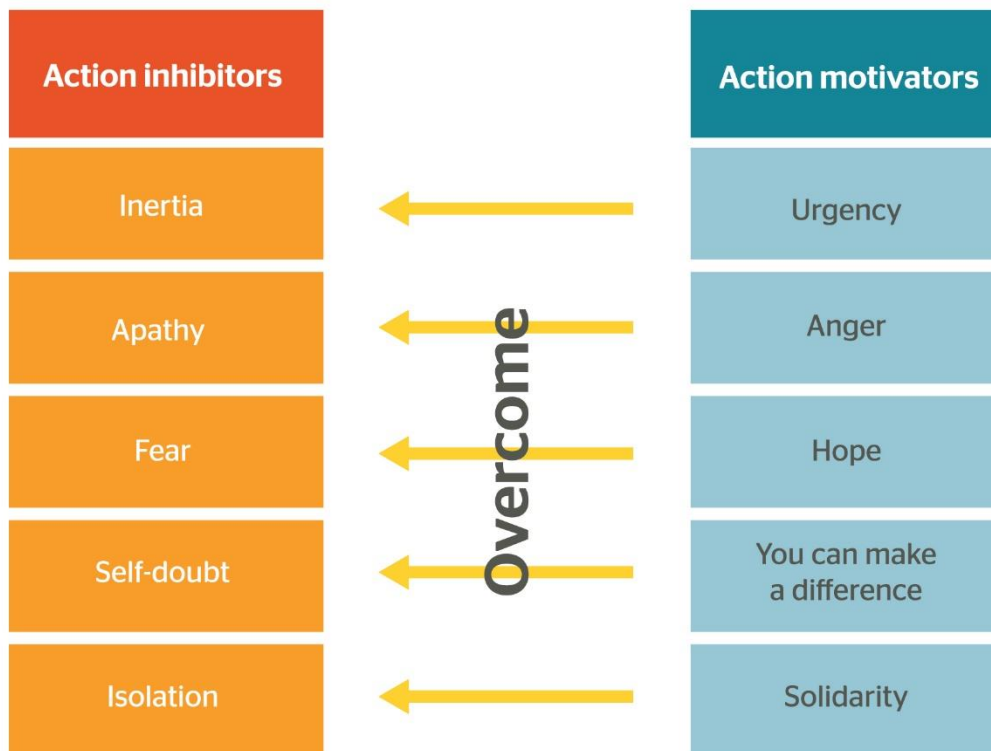
Motivations tend to be personal. These might include wanting to meet others, wanting to help others, or wanting to improve local services.

Triggers to do something may stem from an emotional reaction such as anger about a local decision, or just being asked to get involved.

Resources relate to personal resources such as the confidence to join in or skills to offer, as well having the time to become active at community level.

Opportunities may be activities or events in a local community centre, being asked for an opinion, seeing an advert for people to join a local group.

We talked about what helps and hinders people’s involvement in the Involvement section of the guidance. When it comes to action, Marshall Ganz, in *People, Power and Change* (see Resources box, below) outlined action inhibitors and action motivators:



It is important to remember that to keep people active, they need to have some positive experiences of achieving what they set out to do.

Proactive action and reactive action

A simple way to think about the action your Local Conversation takes, has taken or might undertake is to think about action as either **proactive** or **reactive**. This is a simple but important distinction.

Working **proactively** means identifying what you wish to influence or change and planning to make it happen. You are creating a strategy and tactics to exert some control over what you want to change. As Ganz said, it is about '*figuring out how to turn what you have into what you need to get what you want*'. We all make choices whether to act or not.

Working **reactively** is when you respond to something that has been determined by someone else. You can still act, but your response might not have been in your plans. Delivering both proactive and reactive work is a balance. You may feel that a lot of your Local Conversation's focus was steered more towards the reactive work required by the multiple crises that emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is natural and essential in many cases. You should remember, however, that Local Conversations is a programme designed to change the medium and long-term causes of ill-health and early death. It is appropriate to have a focus on more immediate issues at times, but the Lead Organisation and the Steering Group should regularly review and consider the balance between reactive and proactive work and move to a more proactive position as soon as it is possible. There is no

‘formula’ for deciding how to balance this, so you need to keep listening and planning.

From talking to doing

How many times have you sat in a group or at a meeting where people talk about what they would like to change over and over again, but never do anything about it? This is where your Community Plan comes in, which is a crucial document for agreeing your plan of action and getting organised.

When people are organised, communities get heard - and power begins to shift, creating real change for good. As a community organiser said, *“It’s all about people taking action on their own terms over issues they care about with other people close to them.”* ([Locally Rooted](#), 2020).

See the Approach section of the guidance for further information.

Resources:

- Marshall Ganz, [People, Power and Resources](#)

4. Equity, diversity and inclusion

Equity is about ensuring people have the right amount of resources, support and information to ensure that they have as equal an outcome or chance of success as any other person or group.

Diversity is about recognising, respecting and valuing differences in people. The diversity of the local population for example, should be reflected in governance and decision-making groups.

Inclusion is about ensuring people are valued, involved and influencing. It involves taking deliberate action to create environments where everyone feels respected and able to achieve their full potential.

Communities are made up of diverse groups of people, including people of different genders¹, ethnic backgrounds² and religions³, disabled people⁴, older people⁵, young people⁶, members of LGBT+ communities⁷, people with mental health needs⁸, people with learning disabilities⁹, and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁰ It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a

¹ LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, [Confronting Gender Inequality](#), London School of Economics (2015)

² Cabinet Office, [People living in deprived neighbourhoods](#), Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)

³ Welsh Government, [Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019](#) (2020)

⁴ DWP, [Disability facts and figures](#) (2014)

⁵ Public Health Scotland, [Older people](#) (2021)

⁶ Public Health Scotland, [Young people](#) (2021)

⁷ Equalities Office, [National LGBT Survey](#) (2017)

⁸ NHS England, [The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health](#) (2016)

⁹ Public Health England, [Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health](#) (2018)

¹⁰ Cabinet Office, [Socio-economic background \(SEB\)](#) (2019)

proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion and that you know who lives in your neighbourhood. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, including whether it is designed to be inclusive and centres the needs of more marginalised people. You must positively target the involvement of under-represented groups and those whose voices are seldom heard and create allyships which help to increase and champion their voices. Local Conversations should be speaking out about the key issues affecting underrepresented groups of residents in their neighbourhood (including local and national government policy changes and legislative developments) and providing opportunities for people and communities that are less visible or traditionally less involved to participate.

Lead organisations and Steering Group members need to build the skills, confidence, tools, and techniques to ensure that they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion.

Reflection:

- How do you currently discuss and raise the profile of diversity and inclusion in your Local Conversation?
- Do you need to build confidence and knowledge to hold effective discussions about who is and is not involved? What action can you take to ensure the Local Conversation is equitable, diverse and inclusive?
- Do you need a working group to focus directly on equity, diversity and inclusion?

You should reflect on equity, diversity and inclusion on a regular basis - at least annually. You could also ask residents from minority ethnic groups, LGBT+ residents, or disabled residents, for example, whether they feel involved or not in the Local Conversation, and if the actions you have undertaken or are planning to undertake are priorities for them. Ask if there is anything you can do to further their involvement and to support the action they might desire to undertake. The best way to avoid diversity and inclusion being seen as a tick box exercise is to prove that it isn't one - by showing the changes you are making through the action you are taking.

Making the Local Conversation an attractive and diverse hub will energise the project and help to mobilise people around its vision and priorities for the whole of the neighbourhood - engaging people in actions that will lead to longer term change. This includes running a variety of activities which appeal to different people in the community, providing a pathway to ambitious and important change through action and influence, ensuring that people speak for themselves and not for others, and presenting a public face which reflects the make-up of the neighbourhood. For example, if you prioritise increasing opportunities for social connections because loneliness is an issue in your community, you will need to find out what is appropriate and engaging to different groups of people. For example,

some people might like to meet for tea and cake, some might like to play dominoes, some might like baby massage classes, some might like to improve their English. Equally, if the Local Conversation Steering Group is represented only by white people over 50, then others are likely to think it is not for them.

Some people will need more support and possibly more resources to be as active as others; it is not about treating everyone the same. Equity, diversity and inclusion is about aptitude as well as attitude - Lead Organisations and Steering Group members need to develop knowledge, skills and confidence to ensure they understand and practice equity, diversity and inclusion.

Equity, diversity and inclusion is covered in greater detail in the Involvement section of the guidance.

5. What you can do to support action, including some practical examples

When taking action, it is important that you think about what you want to achieve and why, otherwise there is a risk that you could end up with a series of actions that are disconnected and unrelated to the aims and priorities of your Local Conversation.

In Section 2, above, we identified the different types of action you can take. Before you get there, a great deal of work is required which is mainly outlined in other sections of this Practice Guide. These include:

- A strong understanding of the neighbourhood's **context**, held by the project lead, the Steering Group and all who are closely involved and want to bring about change
- A broad level of **involvement** across the neighbourhood, as well as ensuring a number of residents are very closely involved, which will help the Local Conversation identify priorities
- Strong **governance** processes in place
- A clear and defined **approach**, so that you can build a plan and learn from successes as well as challenges
- Related to the context, a close understanding of who lives in the neighbourhood and who operates there; other groups, who holds power, and who can influence change. These are key people to build **relationships** with, which can support you to take direct action.

Identifying local priorities

As noted above, and in greater detail in the Involvement and Context sections of the Practice Guide, it is important to ensure a diverse range of people who represent the make-up of the neighbourhood are involved in the Local Conversation. This ensures that their priorities for action - and the neighbourhood's priorities for action - become your priorities for action.

Identifying local skills

Try to be strengths-focused; everyone has something that they are good at. Your task is to find out what people are good at and to link people with similar interests and complementary skills together so that they can work on something that they enjoy for the common good. There are lots of ways to go about this, some of which are discussed in detail in the Approach and the Involvement sections of the Practice Guide.

Planning for action

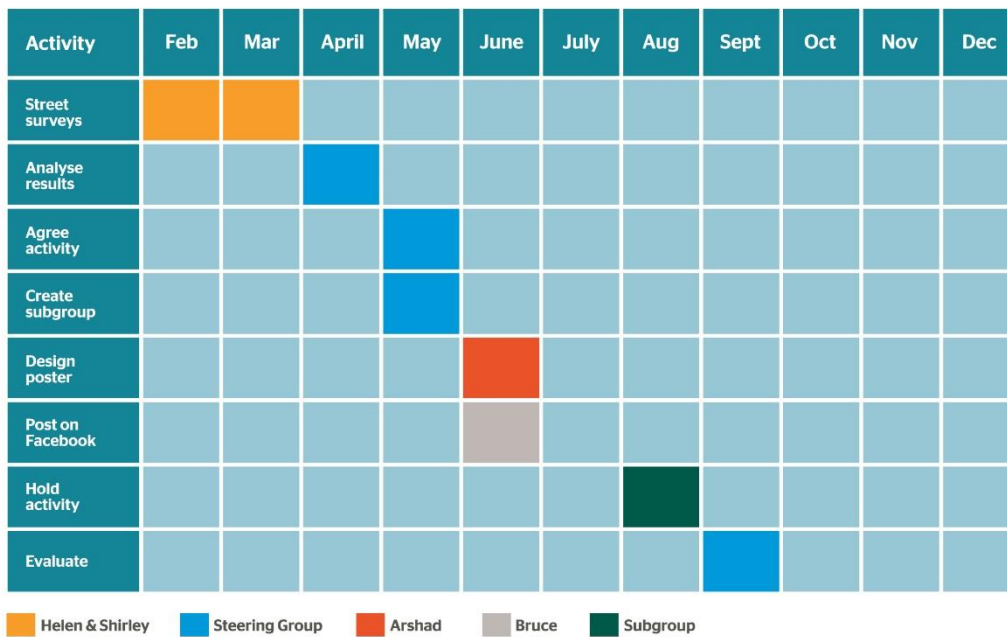
Once you know what people want to change or improve, and the pool of skills you have to do it with, it is time to make a plan. Local Conversations' community plans have been designed with this in mind, to support this with a step-by-step process.

Within Local Conversations' community plans, you have clear priorities and actions you hope to achieve within them. The objectives underneath each action support you to get there. To really get into the nitty-gritty, you might then need to plot what you need to do to achieve each objective.

For example, if you are seeking to start an employability hub, this means at the very least, you need: dedicated people to operate it; a space to meet; CV templates; step-by-step guides; a wealth of knowledge of job websites for varying trades and levels of experience; and good connections with local training providers, businesses and other employers, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, and likely the local authority and jobcentre. These relationships require building. You will also need to write, agree or find templates and guides, research relevant knowledge and identify, recruit and support staff and volunteers.

Once you have a detailed plan, you might find it useful to have a visual oversight of what is happening and when. This can help the Steering Group to regularly review what is coming up and to ensure that the actions that are supposed to have happened, have happened. A Gantt chart is a good way of sequencing action over time, which helps you to keep an oversight of what needs to happen, when, in which order, and who is responsible.

You can create a Gantt Chart in Microsoft Excel or Google Sheets by listing dates across the spreadsheet columns and filling in cells with colours. You might use individual days, weeks, or months for tasks. You can also download [this template](#), for example, and change it as you need.



It is likely that having someone in charge of each strand of action will help to drive it forward. If tasks are not clearly assigned there is a risk that either nothing will happen or that several people may take action and duplicate what each other are doing. Even worse, you may end up with different people working in ways that contradict or undermine each other! You can also use your Gantt chart to assign responsibility for tasks and actions.

In assigning responsibility, remember to check whether the individuals named are clear about what they are being asked to do and whether they feel comfortable and confident with the tasks. Check whether they need help or support or access to certain resources.

Exercise: design a Gantt chart

- With your Steering Group, choose one of the goals from your Community Plan that you are planning to achieve within your neighbourhood.
- Divide the listed actions and objectives towards that goal into a Gantt chart with each of these listed in the first column.
- Then, together, work out the required steps to get there. These also need to go into your Gantt chart.
- Finally, figure out when you want or need to achieve your goal by, and work backwards.
- Now this is complete, you have a timetable ready to go - and a clear path to achieving your goal.

Campaigning and lobbying

Campaigning can address the root causes of an issue and not just the effects. You might be offering an advice service for people living in poor housing but you might also want to campaign to improve housing conditions. Campaigns can help those least heard have a voice through supporting them to take action with others in a similar situation. Lobbying is when you try to persuade someone to change a policy or a practice and is part of a campaigning approach.

The key to a successful campaign is planning - you need to be clear about who is the target of your campaign (for example, is it about publicising a cause to the general public, is it about targeting a group of politicians with specific policy responsibilities, or maybe both); you need to be clear what the aims of your campaign are /what you want to change; you need a simple message and sense of humour helps - make it fun!

Campaign tactics can include:

- Writing letters to those with power over decisions and resources
- Writing a letter to the local newspaper
- Monitoring compliance of existing laws or policies, and seek to gain enforcement if necessary. For example, using the Equalities Act 2010 to ensure wheelchair users can access buildings
- Using people's stories and support people to give their personal testimonies of the impact on them now and what could be different
- Organising a petition, either in hard copy or online through [change.org](https://www.change.org) or [38 Degrees](#)
- Organising a demonstration such as a march, a rally, a picket or some form of street theatre

See also the Influence section of this guidance regarding making connections with power and resource holders.

There are rules around charities and campaigning so make sure you are within government [guidelines](#).

Examples: campaigning and lobbying

In Birkenhead, community organisers gathered stories about food poverty and submitted evidence to a Parliamentary Inquiry into Holiday Hunger. They were invited to give oral evidence. A group of mothers went to London - the furthest some had ever travelled. Karen, Dawn, and Ann shared their experience of living with food insecurity. An MP said she had never heard such powerful testimony. One resident remarked: *"I feel 6ft tall as no one that important has ever listened to me before"*.

A bus service in Wirral which served many of the community's isolated and vulnerable residents was removed. Local people door knocked, petitioned and called local meetings attended by over 100 people who were passionate about "saving our bus". They lobbied the local MP who agreed to help them hold the private company to account and reinstate the bus service.

From [Stories of Action, Community Organisers](#)

Widening the scope of the Local Conversation

Once your Local Conversation starts becoming more established, you can begin to plan how you can broaden its scope and move it along the path towards achieving its priorities. This is covered in detail in the Involvement section of the Practice Guide.

Making contacts, networking and developing partnerships

One key action you can take is to broaden your network. To do this, think about the following:

- Who else do you want to get on board to help with the Local Conversation, and why?
- Are there any local residents with links or connections to these people or groups already?
- Can you delegate the task of relationship building to certain individuals?

Many groups work hard to achieve their objectives but in isolation. There may be others trying to tackle the same issues that you could partner with, or indeed local council strategies and policies that could be helpful in furthering your aims through additional funding or specialist support. It is important therefore to do a bit of research about who might be a helpful partner. You may want to team up with another organisation to support your Local Conversation. This might be a short-term arrangement to deliver something specific now, or it might be a longer-term relationship that has the potential to deliver a number of benefits into the future. This is also discussed in the Influence section of the Practice Guide.

Here are some of the reasons you may want to form local partnerships:

- You may want to partner with an organisation who can deliver part of something for you. They may do this for free, because it is part of what they do anyway, or they may want something (whether money or some other kind of reciprocal arrangement) in return
- You may be able to share or exchange resources, for example, the use of a venue
- You may want to partner with an organisation because they have similar concerns or goals to you, and you want to share ideas and campaign together.

Building a strong network of local contacts should help you to build strong partnerships. The Influence and Relationships sections of the guidance take you through approaches to identifying potential allies and stakeholders.

Here are some tips to remember when trying to engage people in your network sphere:

- Make sure you invite the people who you want to build relationships with to key events and activities. Say thank you to them afterwards and acknowledge their contributions in publicity.
- Even if they don't turn up to things that you want them to, keep them informed about what you are doing and the success that you are having.

Allocating or spending money

Another action you can take - to support your other actions - is allocating the funds you have to specific activities. You may need a process for how you are going to agree what you spend your money on within the Local Conversation. Your spending needs to relate to your agreed plan and the priorities set by the community.

Beyond this however, you may need to:

- Agree how you are going to distribute funds across the different priorities - for example, should each priority get the same amount of money, or might some priorities need more funds allocated to them than others?
- You may need to work out the individual costs of a project, taking account of the amount you will need to spend on different items, such as:
 - the cost of staff
 - the cost of venues
 - the cost of equipment that you need to buy or hire
 - the cost of catering or refreshments
 - the cost of any transport or travel
 - the cost of any insurance.
- You may also need to think about whether what you are proposing to do might actually generate some sort of income - for example, if people are going to make a contribution towards the costs by paying a small fee to attend a session or event

See the Governance section of the guidance for more detail on grant-making within your Local Conversation.

Applying for funding

Some of your priorities may require more money than you have available to you.

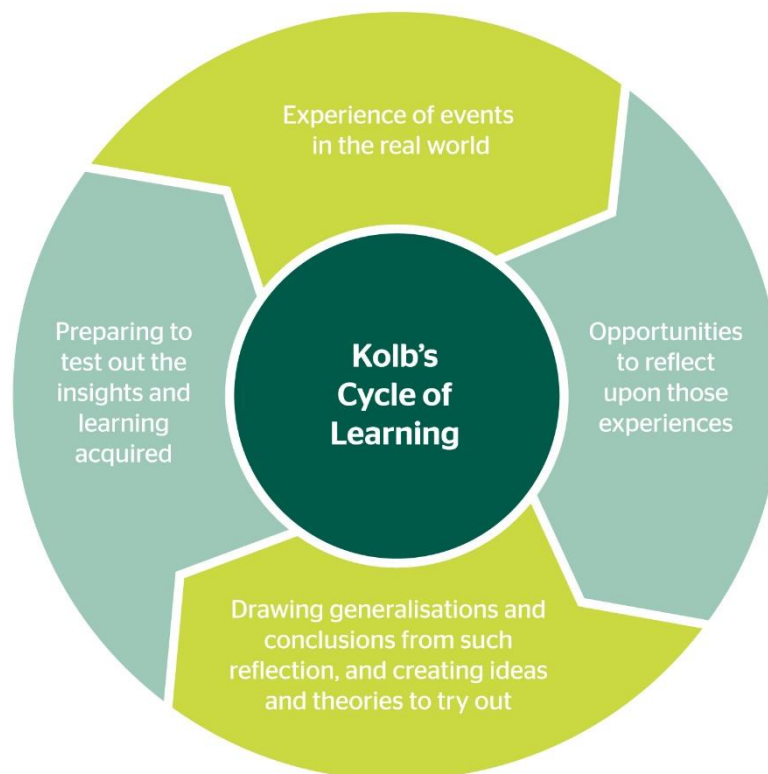
There are a few things to think about when looking for funding:

- What sort of funding are you looking for? Some funders will award small amounts of money to support your core operations, and some will fund specific activities

- Who is making the funding application - you may need to be a constituted organisation with a bank account
- You may be able to draw on the help and experience of people who have written successful funding applications before, for example in the Lead Organisation
- Think about who will manage the grant if the application is successful
- Think about how you will report back to the funder

Action and reflection

It is generally recognised that people learn best from their own experience. Kolb saw a pattern to this learning and he showed it as a simple diagram (*Kolb D. (1984) Experiential Learning*).



Reflection:

- Take some time to reflect and learn from the actions that you took
- Think about how you might use this new knowledge and experience in future action

Resources:

- Cairngorms National Park: [Our Community, A Way Forward](#)- community planning toolkit

- Community Toolbox: [Direct action](#)
- Dan Duncan, Asset Based Community Development: [Asset Mapping Toolkit](#)
- New Economics Foundation, [Building a new economy where people really take control](#)
- NCVO KnowHow: [campaigning and influencing](#)
- North East Social Enterprise Partnership: [Introduction to the principles of participation](#)
- [Stories of Action, Community Organisers](#)

6. Summary

The Local Conversations programme supports residents to actively tackle local issues. Community action is often informal and voluntary and is primarily about collective rather than individual action - people working together to create change. Encouraging participatory action can help bring about the change people want to see in their local community through the life of a Local Conversation and hopefully beyond.

It is the role of the Local Conversation to provide opportunities for action, being aware of those things that can motivate, and inhibit, action. This means involving people in processes - such as listening, building relationships and collectively priority setting - that proactively shape a plan of action. The plan may involve setting up new activities and projects, campaigning and lobbying, and should look to build networks and partnerships that can help with meeting your goals, and particularly your more ambitious proposals for change.

It is important to reflect on action taken and learn from this experience for next time.

This Action section of the Practice Guide should be read alongside Involvement and Influence and particularly complements the Approach section.

7. Helpful do's and don'ts

Do:

- Listen to as many people as possible and support people to speak for themselves
- Recognise that while lots of residents may have the same issues, appropriate solutions may differ depending on who they are and their interests.
- Reflect on whether your priorities will benefit the whole community, not just the more vocal elements

- Value what people can bring to the action - their skills, knowledge, interests and experience
- Make action part of the process - involve residents in creative ways so that can help shape your vision and your Community Plan
- Take every opportunity to ask, ‘how can we do this together?’
- Use a variety of campaigning tactics
- Build networks and partnerships
- Review your action and reflect on what you have learnt

Don't:

- Try to develop a plan without the participation of others
- Be afraid of campaigning
- Get stuck - move on from listening and talking to action

8. A final exercise

Exercise: Reflecting on taking action through your Local Conversation

In this section of the practice guide, we have talked about action - its different forms, how to plan for it, and some practical examples.

Although this guide is aimed at Local Conversations practitioners, it's really important that residents also have access to the tools and resources we have discussed in this section - not least your Steering Group, or whatever it is called locally. Local Conversations are built upon forming connections and creating shared goals, and ensuring everyone involved is supported to take action to make the change they want to see and to understand the importance of equity, diversity and inclusion is crucial to your success.

Presuming you know your priorities for action, ask yourself, your Steering Group and residents - how do they think your goals are going? What are you close to achieving? Does it feel possible, and are your goals realistic?

Be sure to ask residents what support they might need to achieve the Local Conversation's goals. Are training and resources necessary? There is no harm in saying yes - it simply means you know what you need to be equipped.

Sit down with your Steering Group, and think about your actions and your goals. Are you promoting them clearly? Is your collective voice being heard, and have you mapped the pathway to achieving the change you want to see?

The next thing to think about is success. How do you measure success? How do you make sure things are on track, and what do you do if they're off-track? These are solutions you can find together, as a community.

Have you got any top tips or tricks for taking action that might be useful for other Local Conversations? Is there anything you feel is missing from this section, or that you would like to add? Are there any useful references you're aware of that we could add? Be sure to let us know.

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