



Leadership

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 **leadership**. We consider:

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

1. What we mean by leadership

Leadership is about making things happen in an accountable and transparent manner. Whilst much of the discussion around leadership tends to focus on formal roles and individual qualities, it is also about community building and the informal and often unrecognised activity that goes on all the time in communities. It involves creating and promoting a clear vision, collective decision making and relationship building through to chairing a meeting, organising litter picks, and encouraging more people to volunteer. It is not about a heroic individual but a collaborative effort in which everyone can play a part. Leaders inspire others, working with them to realise their aspirations and bring out the best out of everybody.

2. Why leadership is important in the Local Conversations programme

The Local Conversations programme is based upon a belief that local people know their communities best and should direct change in their local area. As experts about where they live, this involves sharing power, so that all voices are heard, and collective ideas are pooled and acted upon. Good leadership means sharing power and playing to people's strengths.

Example: Local leaders

Some leaders will emerge with particular strengths due to their connectivity to others and the extent of their local relationships. They are well-connected into local networks and can easily reach out to friends, family, and neighbours. Because of these strong relationships, they are trusted and people may be more open to sharing personal stories around the issues that matter to them most. As a result, the Local Conversation can better identify local priorities. These kinds of leaders can also be influential in getting people involved or organising people to come together to take action.

An example of this kind of leader comes from the **Local Conversation in Penparcau**. June* is a single mother of two whose activism has earned her the trust of residents in the village. She facilitates a mum's advice group on Facebook which has over 1000 members, she helps out at the local school and now runs the local Parent & Toddler Group. As an influential person she helped increase the numbers of mums who attended free breakfast and maths sessions at the community hub and has assisted with the Local Conversation's campaign to improve the local park.

*Not her real name

Experience of the Local Conversations programme tells us that good leadership is an important factor in the success of local projects. Projects that are well led are more likely to engage more local people, more likely to deliver the kinds of things that people want, more likely to bring about real change, and more likely to exist for the long term.

Running a group is a team effort. It isn't just about the amount of work to do, but also about shared responsibility. Leadership therefore is part of the process of developing an effective group and connecting with others who can help. Many people would not necessarily describe themselves as leaders but they play significant roles in driving the group's agenda forward, sorting out disputes and making sure things get done. And there will be countless others who could also play a leadership role with the right support to develop their confidence and skills.

Exercise: Building on Steering Group strengths

1. In small groups remind yourselves:
 - How you got involved

- Why you got involved
 - What you have enjoyed most about being involved
 - Anything you have found difficult about being involved
 - Other activities you are involved in
2. Making the most of what you bring - in pairs help each other to identify:
- The skills, knowledge, and experience you bring to the Local Conversation
 - The roles you play

Reflection:

- Think about who are the current and potential leaders in your community and those who work with you? Firstly, who has a formal leadership role (e.g. a local councillor, a community worker, the chair of your grants panel), and secondly, who else helps to make things happen - even if this is not a recognised role (e.g. the person who makes sure everyone feels welcome at meetings, someone who questions when others are afraid to speak up, the resident that makes sure their neighbours know about the project)? What do all these people bring to your Local Conversation and how do they do it? You might want to map out all these people and different roles so you can see how to build leadership further within your area. Are there some key action points?

3. Some theory and approaches

Current thinking has moved away from seeing leadership as the preserve of individuals who control and manage to a more dispersed approach which “*emphasises relationships and interaction rather than leader behaviour*” (Pigg (2000)¹). This is especially pertinent for community leadership where people rely on networks and influence rather than formal authority derived from a position of power. In this vein, the concept of ‘Liberating Leadership’ defines leadership as ‘*A process of inspiring, supporting, working with and influencing others in a group, team, organisation or community, based on an agreed set of principles, to achieve common goals and social change*’ (Skinner and Farrar 2009²). In *Building Strong Communities*³, Skinner stresses that this understanding is important because it:

- Places leadership in the community as well as in groups, teams and organisations

¹ (Pigg. K.E (2000) *Community Leadership and Community Theory: A Practical Synthesis*, in *Journal of the Community Development Society*, Vol30, Issue 2

² Community Sector Coalition (2009) *Liberating Leadership: A fresh perspective from the community sector*. Based on the Liberating Leadership Toolkit - written by Steve Skinner and Guy Farrar, edited by Hazel Capper

³ Skinner, S. (2020) *Building Strong Communities: Guidelines on Empowering the Grass Roots*, Red Globe Press

- Promotes working with people, rather than attracting followers
- Bases leadership on a set of principles - there is a strong values base - that many definitions of leadership do not have
- Aims to achieve common, rather than individual goals, and social change, rather than just changes within the organisation.

Leadership styles

Much has been written about leadership styles, mostly related to leaders as individuals and therefore based on personal qualities and attributes. The models outlined below all have relevance for community leadership - where the aim is collective action to achieve shared aims.

Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership, sometimes called shared, dispersed or collective leadership, is concerned with the practice of leadership rather than specific leadership roles or responsibilities. It is concerned with enabling all members of a group to use and develop their skills and interests, and to take responsibility for their actions. Each individual group member has a leading role which they can carry out with “purpose, confidence and authority”⁴. It recognises that people can learn from one another, and builds capacity for change and improvement.

Example: Local control

Since 2015, residents on the **Old Fold and Nest estates in Gateshead** have been involved in a Local Conversation project, supported by local community organisation Edberts House. The local residents got together to identify priorities that matter to them, such as activities for young people, employability, health, and community cohesion. The project uses the two community hubs, Edberts House and Pattinson House, to bring the community together and begin to address these concerns.

Over the past year, the Local Conversation has been continuing their work to place control back into local residents’ hands. Local men at the Pattinson House site decided they wanted a space for themselves where they could come together to develop their cooking skills and take part in outdoor activities. Together, the residents created their own group to meet their own needs and were so successful they are now working to expand the group into a bike garage for the local community, all without any staff support.

The Local Conversation is completely led by residents through a steering committee which shapes the project and ensures local priorities and needs are addressed and keeps the control of the funding in local people’s hands to meet the real needs of the local

⁴ Kirk, P. and Shutte, A.M., (2004) *Community leadership development*. Community Development Journal, 39 (3)

area. Most activities run through the project are led by local people, and due to the practice of controlling and shaping the project, now feel they can have more control over their personal situations.

So, in addition to formal roles such as Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer, this model of leadership recognises a whole range of different roles that people can contribute to their group's development. These roles may be carried out by residents and/or paid workers in the community. Examples of such roles are below (based on Skinner and Farrar⁵).

Role	Activities
Facilitator	Consulting and involving others in the group in discussion and decision making, encouraging participation, and finding creative ways to engage and involve people.
Representative	Being informed about local needs, advocating around needs and issues, feeding back and being accountable to the group.
Leadership builder	Supporting people to get involved in activities and encouraging them to take on aspects of leadership which will build confidence and skills.
Questioner	Challenging ways of working which may undermine the group's aims or marginalise people.
Bridge builder	Making connections, networking, building relationships and partnership working across the communities and with other organisations.
Campaigner	Organising for action to raise issues and meet your aims.
Visioner	Developing a clear idea about what the Local Conversation is about, what it is trying to achieve and how.
Catalyst	Helping to motivate people and identify changes needed to meet your aims.
Team builder	Creating a team that works well together, building mutual respect and helping to resolve any conflict in the group.
Entrepreneur	Coming up with new possibilities for ways of working, developing new ideas, promoting potential for the group's development and helping to make any agreed change happen.
Coordinator	Taking a lead in planning and organisation for activities, events and projects.
Governor	Ensuring that there is appropriate oversight of the Local Conversation and robust systems in place to manage it, keep it accountable and focused on local priorities, and make sure decision-making is transparent and led by local people.

⁵ Skinner, S, and Farrar, G. *Liberating Leadership Toolkit*. Community Sector Coalition.

Exercise: Shared leadership

Think about what distributed leadership looks like in your Local Conversation.

Using the roles and activities above, think about who plays these different roles, noting that some people may play several roles.

Discussion prompts:

- Who plays these different roles in your group?
- Could these roles be more broadly shared out amongst several people e.g., through a working group?
- Can people be supported to develop skills to take on new roles?
- Are there any roles that are missing in your group and if so, how can they be filled?
- Are there any roles that people currently play in your group that are missing from the above?

Other concepts in leadership

Systems leadership is similar to understanding distributed leadership. Increasingly, problems and solutions are complex. No one individual and no one organisation can provide all of the answers. Yet trying to work across different organisations or systems is not easy. Each will have its own people, its own ways of doing things, its own targets and objectives.

Systems leadership is about how you work across boundaries. As a Local Conversation you will have limited capacity and limited resources. A good leader will be able to work with others, and identify a range of people, groups and organisations who may be working in the same geographical area or on the same kinds of issues as the Local Conversation. Key to systems leadership is collaboration and the ability to build and sustain relationships, as well as to use these relationships to persuade and influence others.

Host leadership⁶ is based around roles and relies on being able to flexibly move from one role to another as is necessary. The roles of a host leader comprise: the initiator - having a vision; the inviter - encouraging people to be involved; the space creator - making a space for discussion and deliberation of the vision and how to achieve it; the boundary setter - making sure that people understand the way things work and what is expected of them; the connector - networking people in the community and linking with other groups and agencies that can help achieve the vision; the co-participator - joining in the action alongside everyone else.

⁶ Mark Mckergow And Helen Bailey, (2014) *The Six New Roles Of Engagement*, <https://www.hrreview.co.uk/analysis/analysis-hr-news/mark-mckergow-and-helen-bailey-the-six-new-roles-of-engagement/54146>

Servant leadership⁷ is an approach in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. A servant leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps people develop and perform as highly as possible. The most important characteristic in being a servant leader is making one's main priority to serve rather than lead.

Transformational and Transactional Leadership. There is a tension between these two styles but they are not necessarily opposites, there is usually a bit of both going on. Transformational leadership concerns sustained working towards a long term community vision whilst continuing to inspire and motivate people to join the movement. On the other hand, transactional leadership is more about the day to day tasks required to achieve objectives in a structured and systematic manner.

Reflection:

- Which of these understandings of leadership appeals to you and could be helpful in developing leadership in your Local Conversation?

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 genders⁸, ethnic backgrounds⁹ and religions¹⁰, disabled people¹¹, older people¹², young people¹³, members of LGBT+ communities¹⁴, people with mental health needs¹⁵, people with learning disabilities¹⁶, and people from different socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁷ It is critical therefore that all Local Conversations take a proactive approach to equity, diversity and inclusion. It is not enough to be open and welcoming, you must also

⁷ F. Gandolfi, Seth Stone, *Leadership, leadership styles, and servant leadership* in Journal of Management and Research, 2018

⁸ LSE Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power, [Confronting Gender Inequality](#), London School of Economics (2015)

⁹ Cabinet Office, [People living in deprived neighbourhoods](#), Ethnicity facts and figures (2020)

¹⁰ Welsh Government, [Analysis of protected characteristics by area deprivation: 2017 to 2019](#) (2020)

¹¹ DWP, [Disability facts and figures](#) (2014)

¹² Public Health Scotland, [Older people](#) (2021)

¹³ Public Health Scotland, [Young people](#) (2021)

¹⁴ Equalities Office, [National LGBT Survey](#) (2017)

¹⁵ NHS England, [The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health](#) (2016)

¹⁶ Public Health England, [Learning disabilities: applying All Our Health](#) (2018)

¹⁷ Cabinet Office, [Socio-economic background \(SEB\)](#) (2019)

challenge the way in which your Local Conversation works, whether it is designed to be inclusive and whether it 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. See further guidance on this in the section on involvement.

Neighbourhoods are made up of people with different, though sometimes cross cutting, interests and identities and preferences, and it is often the case that some voices are louder than others and some voices are listened to more than others. A challenge for Local Conversations is to ensure that they welcome and reflect the range of community needs, issues and views and that they promote diversity through their leadership.

Leadership is not about the dominant voices getting what they want or assumptions that some people know best and directing community development based only on majority needs. Community leaders need to promote equality, to welcome different perspectives and to model fairness. They need to reach out to ensure that the most marginalised voices such as those of younger people or black and minority ethnic communities are not only heard but are actively supported to play a part in contributing to all the distributed leadership roles described above, including the prioritising of resources and decision making.

All residents should have an opportunity to get involved in the Local Conversation and to contribute to its development. Their legitimacy comes from their links in the community, to speak up for and represent different views and to feedback into the community. This can be a challenge and there may need to be some harmonising of diverse interests in order to build some community solidarity in the longer term. It raises questions about who leads when there is conflict, and it raises issues about power in the community.

Reflection:

- Think about who plays a leadership role in your group. Are there interests and identities that are under-represented? How might you go about changing this?

Example: Local Conversation in Lozells, Birmingham

Lozells is an area in the west of Birmingham with a lot of ethnic diversity, including established Bengali and Pakistani residents, smaller numbers of Caribbean, Irish and White British residents, and newly arrived migrants from countries including Yemen and Syria. Local engagement in collective action has grown throughout the Local Conversation area.

The Local Conversation has also continued to try to engage underrepresented groups in the area (e.g. recent migrants, as well as women and girls) through targeted outreach, such as projects specifically targeting young women and girls, which has significantly increased their representation in the project. Women are now more involved in participating in and managing activities than in previous years. English classes continue to be a significant source of social connectedness, particularly for women. The confidence people gain

through these classes has also increased their ability to act in their communities. Other residents have also continued to similarly deepen their involvement over time, for example moving from the steering group into leading projects themselves.

5. What you can do support effective leadership, including some practical examples

Building shared leadership is a hard and slow process. It often needs to start with engagement and participation in community activities - fun ways that people can come together rather than formal meetings. Once you have engaged with people, make sure you explain what Local Conversations is all about - the fact that residents can make decisions about where they live can build further engagement and confidence that some change is possible.

There are many ways in which people can lead and many ways into leadership. Some people are doers rather than thinkers - they would rather get on with practical activities than spend their time deliberating over plans and priorities. However, once engaged they might be encouraged to join a working group of interest to them and slowly become more involved in community leadership. Progression routes to leadership development are important.

Learning to lead - skills building

Taking a collaborative approach to leadership means that we can identify roles and skills that can be built in communities in order to carry out the tasks required for effective community development. Community leaders need interpersonal and group skills - they listen and make sure all voices are heard; they persuade and they influence; they identify others' strengths, share responsibilities and inspire greater involvement; they are problem-solvers and bridge builders; they collaborate and facilitate a collective community vision; they are accountable; they get stuff done.

Perhaps the most significant leadership characteristic is that of encouraging, training, mentoring and supporting others to become leaders. No one is born with leadership skills. Different people in the community naturally find themselves playing different roles and contributing different skills. With the right support people can recognise the skills they bring, build on them and develop new ones, and thereby provide collective community leadership.

A community leadership development framework developed in South Africa has three components: leading change through dialogue, connective leadership and collective empowerment. In the context of the Local Conversation this is useful in thinking through how to develop leadership skills in the community.

- **Dialogue** recognises that leadership is about process not people and refers to collective thinking and discussion so that groups and organisations can listen to each other and better understand one another.

- **Connective leadership** is about creating a space for team working, identifying how to effectively collaborate to achieve a common goal whilst at the same time meeting the needs and concerns of the individuals involved. Collective empowerment is about helping individuals to find their place, their role, their identity and their voice in the system.
- **Collective empowerment** “comes from the interconnection of individuals in all parts of the system who have a clear conception of their roles. Through the process of collective empowerment individuals develop fruitful relations with others, and clarity about purpose, meaning and value in their work”.¹⁸



Exercise: Building leadership

Leading change through dialogue: Have a go at working on the different elements of this model through discussion and dialogue to bring out the collective thinking of the community. Through listening to the community and involvement in different discussions highlight 10 or 12 priorities or areas that people would like to collaborate about or change. Write each one on a different index card and then place each index card on a larger matrix (this can be drawn on a flipchart paper) which splits into three rows labelled now, soon or later.

¹⁸ Kirk, P. and Shutte, A.M., (2004) *Community leadership development*. Community Development Journal, 39 (3)

Connective Leadership: As a group look at the index cards and map ideas of how you can collaborate to achieve this priority area. Think about the how, why, who and when. Set some targets for collaboration around this goal. You might want to start by taking the top three in the now section from the first exercise or you might want to have a community voting system to highlight the top priorities, or you could just agree them with those involved in your group.

Collective Empowerment: Think about how different members of your group will be involved and contribute. What are the different roles you have and the different support you need to work together? Can you help each other to build confidence? Once you have an initial plan, put in checkback points to come together as a group and review progress.

Once you have worked on the first two or three priorities you can review how it goes and what you can do differently or change. You might want to take on some of the other priority areas then as well.

Example: Local Conversation in Longbenton, Tyne & Wear

Justice Prince, the lead organisation supporting the Local Conversation in Longbenton, has developed a community development training course. Since 2019 it has supported 10 local people to achieve a Level 4 qualification in community development, including Local Conversation Steering Group members and action group representatives.

Justice Prince strengthen the involvement of those involved in the Local Conversation by transferring power to them - enabling core volunteers to increase their control by taking on key leadership roles within the community. The community development training is central to their approach of development by way of tackling the social determinants of health.

The approach values peoples lived experience and local knowledge and the process equips volunteers with the necessary skills, knowledge and space to develop local solutions to local concerns. Knowledge is power and underpins local leaders' ability to influence decisions that affect them and/or how things work in their community.

Reflection:

- What training or support might you need to be an even better leader yourself, or enable others to become leaders?

Resources:

- How to Be a Community Leader, Chapter 14 Community Toolbox, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/leadership-functions/become-community-leader/main>
- Liberating Leadership: practical resources for community groups includes exercises for a three day training programme
- Big Local: Reflections on Community Leadership (Paper Two), McCabe, A., Wilson, M., Macmillan, R. <http://www.ourbiggerstory.com/reports.php>

6. Summary

Local Conversations is about residents making decision about their communities. This should not be the preserve of a few, and understanding leadership as something that can be shared rather than thinking about leaders as charismatic individuals is helpful.

Anyone can become a community leader and there is room for lots of community leaders. Leaders may be doers or thinkers or both. Community leaders rely on their connections and networks to achieve agreed aims, rather than formal roles and authority. People may need help to recognise that they are playing a leadership role and they might need support in developing their confidence, skills and knowledge.

7. Some helpful do's and do not's

Do:

- **Engage your community:** this will help make sure you have a clear and shared vision and are open to collective decision making to build ownership.
- **Be flexible around ways people can get involved:** remember there are all kinds of leadership roles and community contributions.
- **Offer fun and open ways to engage communities:** people won't automatically sign up for leadership roles you need to get to know them, build relationships and make sure that people feel safe and included. This will help you develop shared ownership which is a foundation for leadership.
- **Distribute leadership across the group:** remember to work with everyone to see what they want to offer to share and collaborate for a better Local Conversation. Remember it is not about a heroic individual but a collaborative effort where everyone can play a part.

- **Treat everyone as an expert of their own experience:** remember everyone is an expert on where they live so in designing leadership opportunities make sure that all voices are heard, and collective ideas are pooled and acted upon.
- **Create support and training to build leadership:** think about the support and training you can give community members to build their confidence. This will lead to including more people in your Local Conversation and more willingness of people to take on a range of roles. With the right support people can recognise the skills they bring, build on them and develop new ones, and thereby provide collective community leadership.
- **Remember that not all roles are formal:** ensure you have a range of ways people can be leading and remember many of these are informal roles like welcoming people or talking to a neighbour to signpost them to a local service.

Don't:

- **Have a narrow definition of community leadership:** let the community members tell you what roles and responsibilities they want to contribute and ensure your Local Conversation is open enough to accommodate different levels of confidence and input. It all counts.
- **Just listen to the loudest voices:** make sure you include underrepresented and underserved communities and work to support leaders from a wide range of diverse communities.
- **Assume everyone wants to sit on a committee or be an overt leader:** some may want to contribute practically instead. For example, helping others or engaging a group you find hard to involve.

Reflection:

In this section of the practice guide, we have talked about leadership - including what it means, some theory, and some practical examples.

- What three things have you taken away from this section that you can use to support greater leadership in your Local Conversation?
- What can you add to this section in terms of theory around leadership?
- What practical examples or tips around leadership can you add to this section?

8. A final exercise

To bring everything together in this section we would like you to do one more exercise:

Exercise: Understanding leadership in your Local Conversation

In this section of the guide, we have talked about leadership. 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. Their understanding of leadership and who the local formal and informal community leaders are may be very different to yours. There may well be current or future community leaders in very close proximity to the Local Conversation (or even taking part in its actions/activities) who you and/or your Steering Group have overlooked. The risk of overlooking local talent is likely to increase the less diverse your Steering Group members and sub group leaders are, and even more so if your Local Conversation as a whole is not reflective of the diversity of your local neighbourhood.

As a final exercise we would like you to facilitate a session on leadership with your Steering Group in which you discuss the importance of understanding leadership, and summarise the different types of, and approaches to, leadership described in this section. Once you have introduced the topic you should then encourage the Steering Group to discuss the extent to which its leadership (and that of any subgroups) represents the diversity of the neighbourhoods and what the future leadership of the Local Conversation might look like. This exercise should help you and your Steering Group consider diversity within the leadership of the Local Conversation and contribute to its future sustainability as they look at future leadership.

Having done this please let us what we could add to this section that might help others, in terms of exercises to try, sources of information from which to better understand leadership, and how you have shared it with residents.

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