



The United Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD



Transforming Communities - Taking action locally

A Community Engagement Toolkit –
Getting Started

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This guide is designed to assist and support local social action, as people from across the Synod work together to transform communities.

The Uniting Church's advocacy for social justice issues is grounded in the affirmation that all people are of equal worth and dignity in Christ. God intends for the whole of creation to flourish, and it is part of our mission as the church to identify and work against the inequalities and injustices that result from flawed humanity and broken systems.

Through (project) Plenty we echoed this commitment to Transforming Communities and to supporting: Wellbeing and Mental Health, Environment and Sustainability, and First Peoples.

The foundational document for the Uniting Church in Australia, the Basis of Union, highlights our call to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a foretaste of the new creation in Christ. We answer this call by loving and serving our communities, particularly those among us who are most vulnerable.

If you are planning a meeting, or have held a meeting, the Uniting Church Queensland Synod would love to hear from you. If we can support you to engage in these priority issues, please contact us on 07 3377 9777 or at projectplenty@ucaqld.com.au

Getting started

GATHER: Arrange a gathering of key people to explore working together on a social justice issue. Hold discussions between local organisations and community members with organisations and people who are gatekeepers of local community resources - this can include councils, schools, aged-care facilities, Chambers of Commerce, childcare centres, etc. Think about ways to connect with the wider Synod such as agencies and schools as well as other local community groups. See the Tips for Holding a Meeting information below.

LISTEN/RESEARCH: Research local community data, information about the social justice issue in your community, stories of local needs, what is already happening in the community. Look at the local community's capacity, skills, knowledge and resources, and how to build on these to address a social justice issue. You can also do a community survey asking local key people about local needs and where they have identified issues.

IDENTIFY: What capacities do we have to address the social justice issue? What assets do we have in terms of building and resources as well as people capabilities? Discussions should focus on working out how to make better use of resources to address a social justice issue, while sharing knowledge and avoiding duplication of efforts. Place-based approaches are most successful where local arrangements exist to drive the necessary actions. Resourcing activities to address a social justice issue can often involve better targeting of existing resources or partnering across local organisations and community members to redirect existing resources.

EXPERIMENT: Identify a low effort activity or event based on all your previous reflections on the social justice issue. This might be a community lunch, a craft afternoon, a men's breakfast, seniors chat afternoon, a sing along afternoon tea etc.) Plan this out carefully and have a go.

REFLECT AND RESET: Reflect on what you have learnt. What went well? Get feedback from the people you are seeking to serve. What was unexpected? What was confirmed? Is there a demonstrable need and a benefit to running another event?

Holding a meeting

Who Should be Invited?

- what parts of the Uniting Church are in your community? Local agency, school, hospital, congregations?
- local organisations and local community members who are currently working in the local community to address the social justice issue
- local people with lived experience of the social justice issue
- local people who are interested in helping to address the social justice issue

Planning a Community Meeting

Things to consider include:

- is your venue accessible and comfortable for everyone who might want to attend?
- is there enough space for everyone?
- is water available and perhaps refreshments?
- is your event at a good time for everyone who might want to come?
- what are people expecting from the event? The meetings can be an opportunity for people to contribute their views and start the planning process.
- is there an existing event or activity where you could hold a meeting to engage with people to hold a meeting?
- could a meeting be held with other groups or organisations to attract more people?
- how much will participants know about the issue and to ways of responding to it? (This may inform how much time is needed to introduce the social justice issue or to allow in detailed discussions.)

Holding the Meeting

- organise a person to be a facilitator for the meeting to focus the discussion, balance opportunities for participants to speak, and to manage participant interactions. The facilitator can also summarise what was said and decided, and agreed actions, at the end of the meeting.
- organise a person to record the key points from the discussions and to record any decisions and actions.
- make use of the sample questions below to guide the discussions in the meeting:
 1. What already exists in the local community to address this issue?
 2. Who are the local organisations and local community members already involved in addressing the issue and who could potentially be involved to address this issue?
 3. How can we build on local initiatives/create local initiatives to address this issue? Are there any other local communities who have initiated action on this issue?
 4. What information do we need that we don't currently have?
 5. What are our next steps? Who will do this? When will this be completed?
- Participants may wish to consider the needs of different groups of people e.g. women, men, children, older people, people with a disability, First Nations people, people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.
- Provide a chance at the end of the meeting for participants to discuss anything that wasn't captured under the sample questions.

The above is based on: A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections facilitation guide (2017). Equality Unit, Scottish Government and Combating Loneliness: A guide for local authorities (2012). Campaign to End Loneliness and Local Government Association.