



## **#ConnectMe – Resource Pack 3**

### **Celebrate your street – together!**



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## **Unit 7 – Holding meetings – during and after Covid**

### **Covid impact**

Whilst we're all still living through the impact of the Covid19 pandemic and the range of social restrictions it imposes, your biggest problem isn't the law or guidelines in fact, it is what they are doing to people's motivations. You may find that your neighbours just can't prioritise thinking about a street celebration.

Our recommendation, therefore, is to start small. Indeed, very small. To make your initial invitation feel like a connecting "gift", without expectation, rather than asking people to immediately start designing an event with you.

So, whilst this Unit also deals with the best way to manage larger meetings to discuss creating a street event, it may well be some time before you and your neighbours feel ready to progress to that level.

Approaches like the pebble trails and Garden Gate Gabs will keep connection bubbling until better times.

### **When meetings can resume**

People gathering for the first time always feel nervous and using an ice-breaker can really help. Here are a few ideas:-

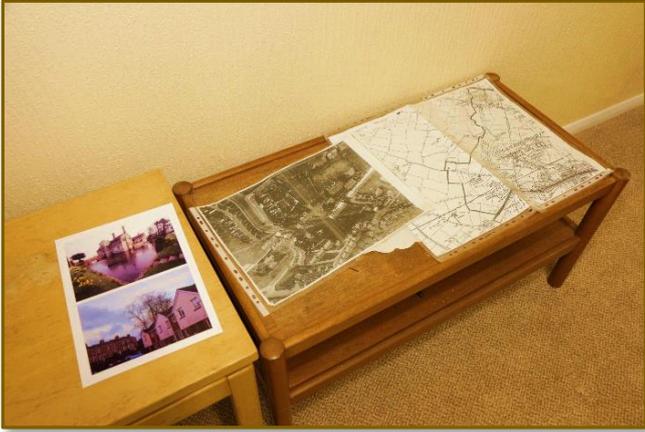


Table resources – You can lay out images of the street, old and new with little “what’s this?” style quizzes.

If you can, colourful tablecloths help to create a warm, fun, welcoming environment. If you’re a creative/artist of any kind then allow your imagination to suggest what would make a welcoming first impression but remember always to put yourself in the mindset of your participants.

Pub-style quizzes – these have the advantage of being in a familiar, non-classroom type format and even

though, in fact, people are sharing their knowledge, it is in a fun context. Giving out prizes and awards, particularly if they’re unexpected is an extra, fun dimension.

Music – live music, particularly when it’s a surprise and has been chosen carefully for the group, can be a great extra “feel-good” benefit. When people have received more than they were expecting it feels like a Gift. The whole *Squilometre* ethos is based on the transformative power of Gift. Gift, just like love, is one of the few things in the Universe that grows the more it is passed on!

### **Setting up the space for larger meetings**

If you’re using a community meeting room or space of some kind it’s worth spending some time on planning for your session and setting up the meeting space appropriately.

Consider, what kind of space do you find welcoming? Give this some thought and make it as detailed as you can. What would you find off-putting? Then try putting yourself in the mindset of your group members. What kinds of space do you think they would find welcoming? Be creative and be authentic but here are a few guidelines that usually work well:-

- 1) As mentioned above, check for general comfort – heating, lighting, sound, chair cushions.
- 2) Use colour and fabrics to soften a space. If it’s very office- or classroom-like, a few throws or mats can go a long way to making it feel more comfortable.
- 3) Tables can act as a comforting buffer between strangers so can be useful for the first meeting or so. However, they can also act as a barrier so you might like to progress from using them, to using a circle/horseshoe arrangement as your meetings progress. Activities, aided with images, maps and other resources are also good ice-breakers so tables can be useful.

- 4) We'll cover preparing a Risk Assessment for your meetings in the next Unit. This is ESSENTIAL and may require making some adjustments to the room such as taping down trailing wires or loose flooring. This means that you'll need to conduct the Risk Assessment ahead of time.
- 5) Always ensure that you put furniture and equipment in a hired space back the way you found it. You may want to go back again!



All in all, you're looking for an atmosphere, even if you've booked a hall or public space, that feels as relaxed, comfortable and friendly as your home.

### Creating a safe, enjoyable tone

Taking what we learned in Unit 1 – imagine the below individuals making up your very first meeting and consider what to fill in the last box:-

Member type	Relationship to place	What is the best communication style?
<b>Young mum, new to the area, keen to make new friends.</b>	No memories to share but invested in making new relationships in place	
<b>Older resident with lots of memories of the area. Keen to talk and share.</b>	Lots of memories to share and a need to be heard.	
<b>Older resident who is anxious and shy.</b>	Memories to share but easily over-ruled	
<b>Individual new to the area but keen to know more about local history</b>	No memories but a clear agenda	

The individuals in the above matrix represent the typical types of person who might be on your street/in your place. They have a broad range of reasons for being there and of relationship to the place in question and to each other.

By creating a safe and enjoyable tone of communication that will meet all of their expectations, for at least some of the time, you can help bring them together into a working group.

This might seem a little daunting but there is one fundamental need that we *all* have and that is to be HEARD. So, everything you do will be about good listening skills and about encouraging them in others.

### **The importance of being heard**

There are a range of texts on good listening skills and you're more than likely to have already received training in this in your professional lives. But here are some suggestions that you can use to ensure that people feel heard:-

- 1) Be authentic – always use your own voice. Don't be afraid to be you. You don't need to improve or change your accent or your style. If you're not being you, you'll be uncomfortable and it will show.
- 2) Be the best example – ensure you're truly present when you're listening. All of us are highly sensitive to when someone is not listening, we can see it in their eyes, expression and body language. We learned as children to face-check our parents to know if we fully had their attention and our inner-child has never lost the pain of not being heard by them. So, you need to practise being completely present when you're in conversation. That is, stopping your own inner monologue. Try to suspend your own story in order to open yourself to their mindset. The best way to do this is to say to yourself “**there's something I need to learn here, what is it?**” Again, when you're in a group that can be much harder than it sounds because for every person you're giving that attention to, there are several others that you aren't. So, you need to be the example that shows the rest of the group how to listen to each other too. They're unlikely to take this well as an explicit instruction but if they repeatedly witness your best practice in this regard and feel the benefit of it themselves then they are more likely to follow your example.
- 3) Ring the changes – You might want to move people around and allow them conversation in different smaller groups. In this way, those who tend to dominate the conversation won't be able to do so at the expense of another for an extended time.
- 4) Enlist help - If you have a local Community Builder, an active *Squilometre* or a good friend in your area, reach out to them and ask them to help you facilitate your first meeting.
- 5) End of session round-up – It's a good idea to bring the session to a close, perhaps by bringing people into a circle, and inviting each of them to say something about the session – either what they have learned, or what they enjoyed. In this way, everyone gets to speak. Remember, it's

incredibly important to really listen to these responses; to be present and focused and authentic in your reaction.

### Some general tips

***Top Tip***

Don't forget to smile!

Never underestimate the power of a welcoming smile or the relaxing sound of inclusive laughter. If you're happy and relaxed then they can be too.

Giving lots and lots of encouragement and positivity when ideas are proposed is part of good listening. Positive reinforcement not only shows that you heard the suggestion but when you welcome ideas positively it is a bonding, "feel-good" experience for the participant. We can all remember those times, back in our school days, when a teacher got this right and made us feel valued.

It's worth remembering that everyone is carrying around the baggage of some kind. Every single person has their own trigger points and pain. So, it is possible that you'll need to manage some tensions or conflict. The chances are it is completely unintentional on their part. They're just reacting to their own internal monologue.

So, the answer can be as simple as taking a deep breath, holding silence for a moment, keeping your immediate reaction unsaid until you've had a chance to run this through your mind. Hold compassion for yourself and your neighbours in your heart. Managing your reaction is not the same as being "fake", it just means giving yourself time to re-find the best YOU for the job.

Most of all – find the fun. Make sure that you get heard too and that you get to follow your heart. This is all about love, connection, humanity and fun. If you feel yourself or your project drifting away from that why not plug into the Interwoven Group and re-charge the love!

