



Approach

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

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

This section will talk about your **approach**. We consider:

1. What we mean by your approach
2. Why having an approach is important in the Local Conversations programme
3. Some theory and approaches
4. Equity, diversity and inclusion
5. A summary
6. Some helpful do's and don'ts
7. A final exercise

1. What we mean by your approach

Having an approach is about having a clear and systematic way of engaging with communities, as well as identifying and tackling local issues (some people may call this a 'method'). The approach you take will inform all the areas listed above: how you learn about the local context; how and when you encourage wider and deeper involvement; how you plan to achieve good governance and leadership; how you build and maintain relationships, take action and influence decision makers.

This section of the practice guide will support you to think about what you will need to consider in developing or refreshing your approach, how you identify locally agreed goals and priorities, and the models and methods of community development you can use.



2. Why having an approach is important in the Local Conversations programme

There are many ways of approaching your Local Conversation. What is important is being clear about the path you are taking, why you are taking it and the steps along the way.

Having an approach will ensure that you, colleagues or residents are not left guessing about what to do next in a given situation and it means things won't fall through the cracks and be forgotten.

A clear approach will inform the work your Local Conversation carries out and maximise the opportunity for meaningful involvement so that the action you take is strategic (not only about the day-to-day) and reflects what matters most to local people. It is like going on a journey: you need to know where you are going and why, but also how you are going to get there (car, walk, public transport, bike), and what resources you need to get you there. You also need to be prepared for any difficulties you may encounter on the way. A clear approach provides a map for all those involved to follow or to join along the way.

An approach (or method) helps us to complete a task in a systematic way, and learn as we complete it. You can apply an approach to the Local Conversation as whole and to its component parts, such as developing or reviewing your Community Plan or agreed priorities.

There are various approaches that you can use in your Local Conversation. None of these is necessarily right or wrong. Without an approach your Local Conversation risks being less successful because some of the things that you do may appear random or poorly thought through, rather than being arrived at through using a systematic approach. You need to consider what approach is most appropriate for you to enable residents to make the most of the changes they want.

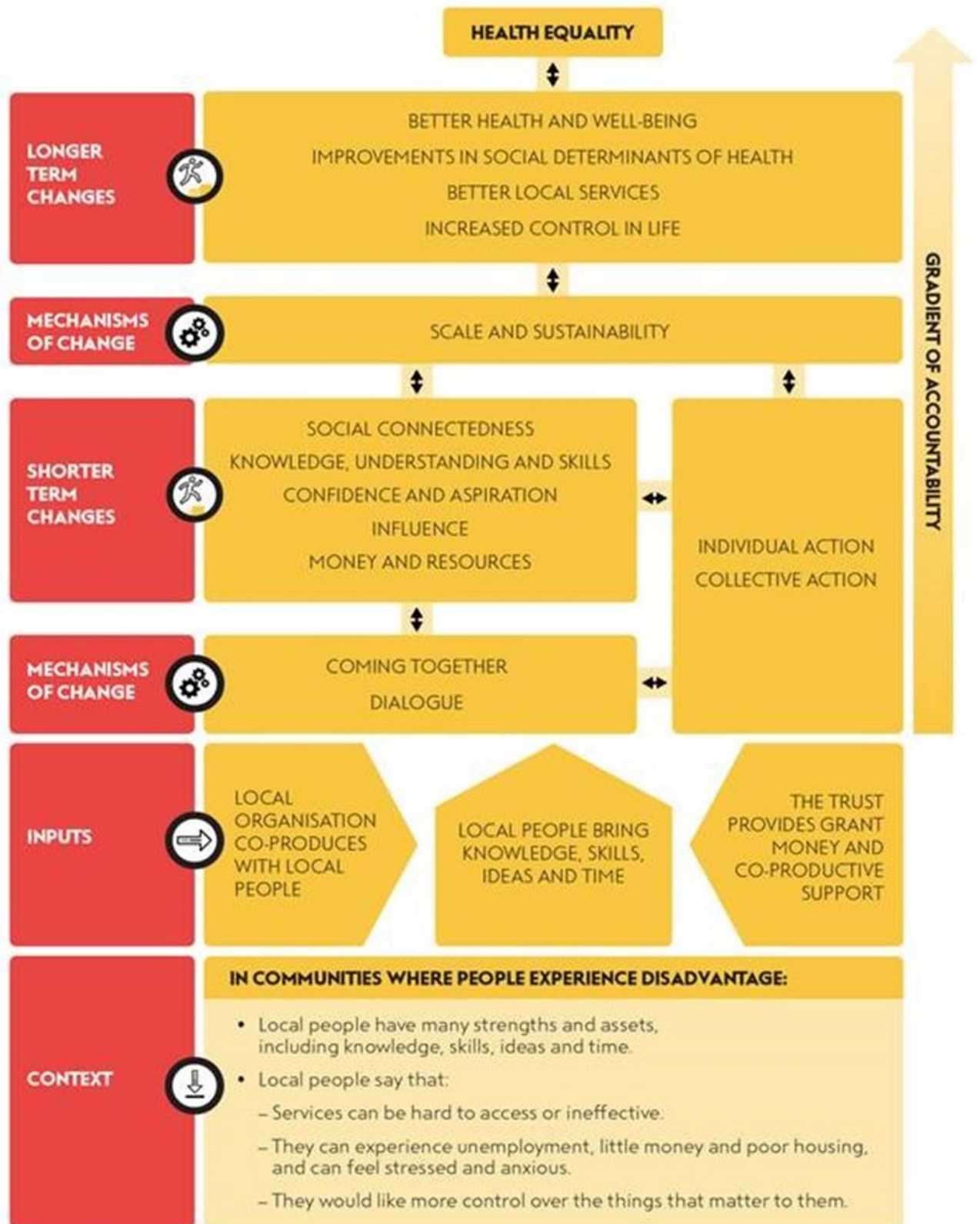
3. Some theory and approaches

Theory of Change

A 'theory of change' is the roadmap for the journey you will make. Having one helps you to understand why you are doing what you do and how you aim to get there, as well as how you can assess or measure your progress. Starting from the destination you hope to get to, it then identifies the routes of travel on the way and what to look out for to make sure you are on the right path. It helps you to think about the assumptions you are making about your journey and what you need to do to get to your destination, as well as to understand the context within which that journey is made.

This is the Theory of Change for the Local Conversations programme, which was co-produced with funded partners:





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To understand the Theory of Change it is easier to start from the top and work downwards:



1. The issue you and we are trying to address is health inequality, and we wish to achieve health equality.
2. We have then identified the long-term and shorter-term change we want to see (impact)
3. From there we have what needs to happen in your Local Conversation in order to get there - the mechanisms of change and the inputs

Having worked back this far, you need to regularly consider:

4. How far you are achieving are you going to do this? What actions and activities are needed to achieve this at different stages? (inputs and outputs)
5. What resources and support will you need?
6. How will you know if you are getting there? (And what are the indicators?)

These questions also help you to explore the assumptions or rationale behind your approach (the Why), so that you can test them out and change direction if they are not supported by what is happening on the ground.

Resources:

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [Evaluating community projects](#)
- NCVO, [How to build a theory of change](#)
- NPC, [Theory of Change in Ten Steps](#)

Some approaches you can adopt

The Trust is not prescribing which approach you use, only that all Local Conversations need to have one as we believe it leads to progression through the Theory of Change in a methodical way. There are a number of different approaches you can use, but the two options are:

- Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)
- Community Organising, or Organising

Approach 1 - Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

As its name suggests, ABCD focuses on identifying the assets, strengths, skills and potential in a community and then building on these. It was developed by John Kretzmann and Jon McKnight in the US in 1993 and challenges more traditional 'deficit' approaches, which tend to focus on what's wrong - the problems, needs and deficiencies of an area.



Asset-Based Community Development is built upon **four key elements**: resources, methods, functions, and evaluation.

Resources (first key element) refers to assets, or those parts of a community which help promote wellbeing. They should be available to everybody within the neighbourhood. Examples include:

- the contributions of residents, and their knowledge, experience, skills and passions
- community groups, associations or clubs
- local institutions, which might include schools and colleges, hospitals, long-term local businesses, local government facilities or meeting places like pubs - essentially, the places that are anchored in the community and support the community
- the local environment, and the neighbourhood itself: the place residents relate to and call their own, as well as everything within it - including community gardens, parks and hubs
- stories, or 'the community way' - how things are, how things are done, and how residents have learnt to survive and thrive within the neighbourhood

Methods (second key element) are the ways in which these resources can be used productively and for the community. There are three key fundamental steps to any method for ABCD:

1. Start with what residents can do themselves as a collective, without any outside help.
2. Then, look at what residents could do with a little outside help.
3. Finally, once these local assets have been connected and mobilised, residents decide together on what they want this outside help to do for them.

You can find out much more about the methods through the links in the Resources section, below.

There are lots of different methods you might wish to use, and you may have developed your own - but those three steps, when built upon and added to, are crucial.

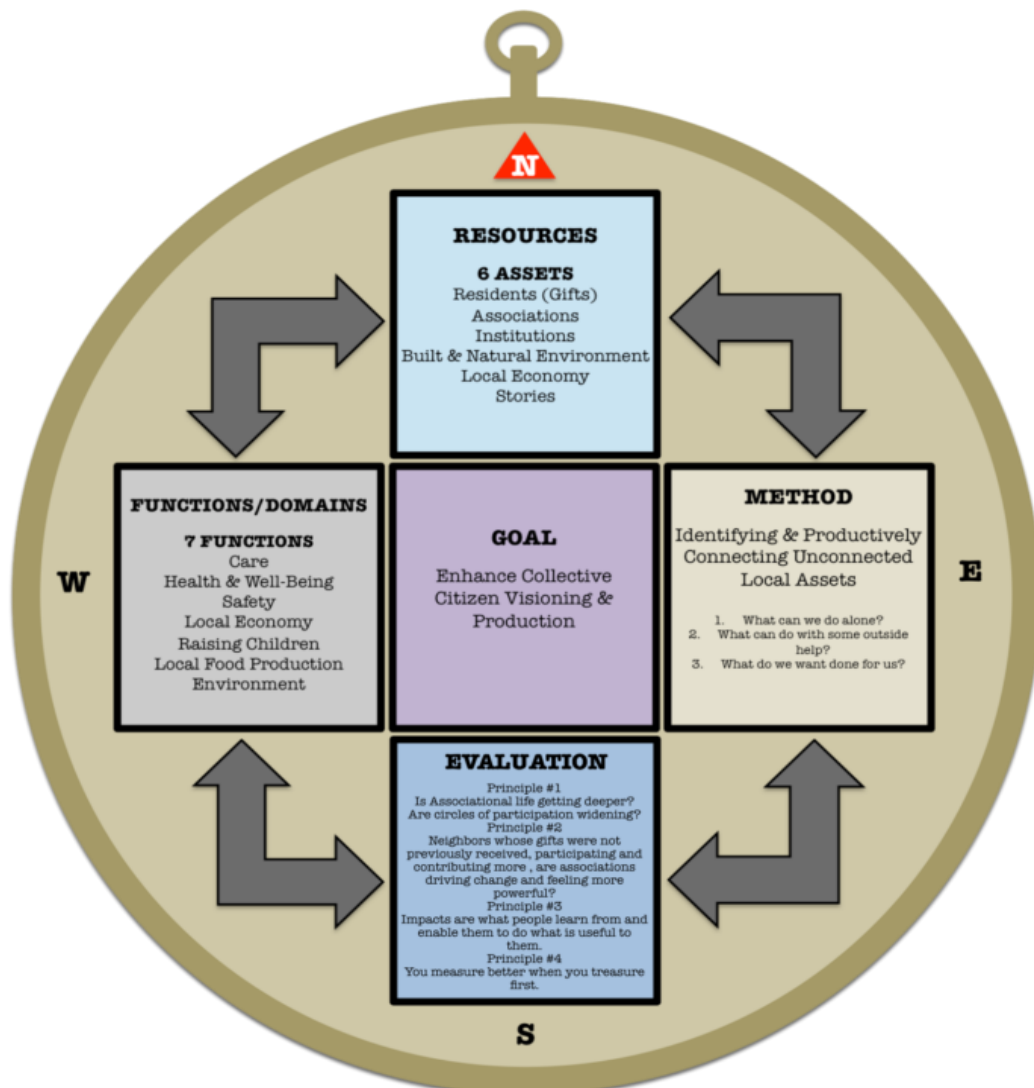
Functions (third key element) - ABCD states that there are the seven key responsibilities (functions) for any neighbourhood - health, safety, environment, economy, food, children and care. It places a responsibility upon communities to work on these and uphold these responsibilities, arguing that where communities fail, no institution or government can succeed.

However, as noted, ABCD is built on a community's strengths. What McKnight describes as three universal and abundant powers are:



- **The giving of gifts** - the gifts of the people in a neighbourhood are boundless. These gifts - talents, skills, experience and wisdom - should be pooled, shared, and exchanged with others for other 'gifts'.
- **The power of association** - when people work together, they join their gifts together and these become amplified, magnified, productive, and celebrated.
- **Hospitality** - we welcome strangers because we value their gifts, and need to share our own. Our doors are open. There are no strangers here; just friends we have not met.

Evaluation - (fourth key element) is key for any work: whether taking action, influencing, or building involvement. In ABCD, it is crucial to evaluate the action you have taken against your key goals, your vision, and the Local Conversations programme vision - to make positive change, to make improvements to the social determinants of health, and to increase community health and wellbeing.



This is not a map, but a compass. Start with any element, but go to every element.



Resources:

- P. Kretzmann, J. L. McKnight, ABCD Institute (1993) - [Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets](#)
- Nurture Development - [About ABCD](#)
- ABCD Institute - [Toolkit](#)
- Nurture Development - [‘The Four Essential Elements of an Asset-Based Community Development Process. What is Distinctive about an ABCD Process?’](#)
- Nurture Development - [‘The Eight Touchstones of Community Building’](#)

Approach 2 - Community organising

Community organising is a different approach - it focuses on building community power and tackling social injustice. Drawing on the work of Saul Alinsky in the US, it is often associated with campaigning but can and often does support communities to influence how things work in their area in a variety of ways. Community organisers reach out and, through a process of listening and connecting people, motivate them to build their collective power. They help people to organise, take action and effect the changes they want to see. As well as working with community members' own potential, community organising aims to change the external policies and practices that affect the local community. There are different models of community organising: some building collective action up from individual listings (e.g. Community Organisers UK); some taking a broad-based approach, which starts with alliances of organisations and works through these organisations (e.g. Citizens UK); others building a community union with branches and members who pay dues (e.g. ACORN).

The Citizens UK model of community organising is built upon trust and cooperation: bringing people together for face-to-face conversations, mapping their networks of relationships, listening to one another, building mutual trust and finding common concerns.

From there, it is crucial to build local control - shared ownership for those residents taking part - of the group. This closely mirrors collective control, which is a key part of the Local Conversations programme theory of change. In neighbourhoods experiencing disadvantage, where change - to services, to local assets, or to what is built - is often imposed on people, building and fostering power is especially important. The so-called 'iron rule' of community organising is to **never do for others what they can do for themselves**. This should sit in tandem alongside work to build close relationships within the group.

Another key aspect of community organising is to develop alliances between local groups in your neighbourhood who are equally devoted to identifying local issues, working together in the public interest, and developing community leaders. This



can include groups of all sorts - faith groups, universities, colleges, schools, trade unions and community groups. Building partnerships is discussed in greater detail in the Relationships section of the Practice Guide.

You can measure the health of these local alliances by considering several things:

- The extent to which listening within and across institutions within the alliance shapes the agenda
- The presence of an effective leadership group of residents
- The payment of dues (this is not applicable for Local Conversations)
- The extent to which community organising is becoming embedded within an institution, which might be through the number of people involved, or the number of people training or trained
- The extent to which the alliance can ‘turn out’ the numbers of people required to make actions powerful.

As noted above, another key aspect of community organising is the developing of leaders. When community organisers talk about the success of their projects, they talk about the depth and breadth of leadership across the community and how it came to be.

Developing new leaders benefits a community group in a number of ways: it opens up opportunities for people who may not have seen themselves as leaders previously; it encourages those who hold power to lead differently; accelerates the learning of those involved, and helps share the weight of work required.

Leadership is nurtured in a number of ways, including through one-to-one meetings and support, training, encouraging residents to take on public-facing roles, building experience of leading action or campaign teams, and sitting on the steering group (or decision-making body). This is covered in greater detail in the Leadership section of the Practice Guide.

When all these things come together: empowered communities, strong local alliances, and community leaders encouraged and developed, community organisers argue that this tips the balance of power in a neighbourhood back towards those who face injustice and marginalisation.

Resources:

- Citizens UK, [What is community organising?](#)
- Citizens UK, [Reweaving the fabric of society](#)
- Community Organisers UK, [What is Community Organising?](#)
- Community Organisers UK, [Our Framework](#)
- Community First, [About Community Organising](#)
- ABCD, Citizens UK, Community Organisers UK and ACORN all offer training in their approach and details can be found on their respective websites.
 - ACORN [website](#)
 - Citizens UK [website](#)
 - Citizens UK, [Community organising via a Facebook group](#)



Books:

- Diamond, N. - 'Community Organising Compared: what community organising is and what it isn't'

As well as explaining different models of community organising, this resource also describes other related approaches, their similarities and differences.

- Midwest Academy - 'Organizing for Social Change'
- Saul Alinsky - 'Rules for Radicals'

Reflection:

Think about:

- If you are already using a formal community development approach, such as ABCD, community organising (or something else), why did you choose it over any other? Who else in your Local Conversation understands it and what steps are you taking to support team and steering group members to understand and use it? It's risky for just one person to hold that knowledge.
- If you are not using a formal community development approach, what can we do together to help you adopt one, and what training would you (and other team or steering group members need) to use it effectively?

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 ethnic backgrounds, religions and genders, disabled people, older people, young people, members of LGBT+ communities, people with mental health needs, people with learning disabilities, and people from different socio-economic backgrounds. 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 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. The approach you take should ensure that the Local Conversations is 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.

Whether you are using an ABCD or organising approach, it is really important that equity, diversity and inclusion runs through everything you do. Practitioners and steering group members need to be constantly discussing their own unconscious biases and those of the people they are listening to in the neighbourhood. For example, some adults may see people exercising their dogs on a patch of green space as waste land, and want it turning in to a play area so it is an asset for their children and a space where they can meet other parents... but that may negatively affect the older people who see it an asset as it is, and without it they wouldn't have anywhere to take their dogs and meet up with each other every morning and evening. In this instance, you need to ensure both views are heard and try and reach a compromise.

More widely, you and your steering group should be reviewing your Community Plan to assess the impact of what you plan to do on the diverse communities in your neighbourhood and ensure no group is no negative on them. If you don't know... ask them.

Exercise: understanding your community

Ask members of the Steering Group to discuss:

- What different communities are there in the area covered by the Local Conversation?
- How confident are you that your approach enable you to actively listen to the voices of the diverse communities in your neighbourhood, so that you understand what is most important to them?
- Who can help you reach those communities that you have least contact with?
- How regularly are you checking in with these communities to ensure your work is relevant to their aspirations?

5. Summary

Having a clear approach will mean that your Local Conversation can plan effectively, stay focused and make sure that what it is doing is relevant to the wider community and is having a real and tangible impact on the community.

You can use a mix of approaches to inform your plans as well as documentary evidence, for example from the census or more locally produced data. This



practice guide briefly describes two formal approaches for working with communities, both to help you ensure that your plans and actions are informed by local residents and to help develop your more detailed strategies. If you feel that you, your colleagues or residents would benefit from further information or training on approaches, please get in touch with us.

In thinking about your approach, it is always important to remember the Theory of Change for the programme and that you are aiming to address the social determinants of health. You will need to think collectively and regularly about what can be done locally by people living in the area and where you will need to influence and work with others (see Influence section of the guidance).

The approach that you take in your Local Conversation should ensure that you are involving and organising people around a clear local vision and supporting communities to make or influence change in their neighbourhood that can ultimately reduce health inequalities.

This Approach section should be read alongside Involvement, Influence and particularly the Action sections.

6. Some helpful Do's and Don'ts

Do:

- Reflect on the effectiveness of the approaches/methods you are using to deliver the Local Conversation? Are you, team members and the steering group united in your understanding of what you are trying to achieve in the short, medium and longer term?
- Communicate how you are approaching your work in an accessible way, so that residents people know what is planned, on what basis decisions have been reached, and how they can contribute
- Make sure you have mapped the different communities in your area and taken their views and needs into account
- If you can't address an issue locally, think about who might be able to help
- Plan for regular reviews so that you can take the time to reflect on what you are learning and change tack if necessary
- Consider and allow for the training needs of the models you adopt.

Don't:

- Assume that you can just wing it without considering your approach
- Stick rigidly to plans or approaches that aren't working
- Skimp on the time for reflection and review

7. A final exercise

Exercise: Reflecting on Approach and your Local Conversation

In this section of the guide, we have discussed some of the key concepts that underpin the Local Conversations programme. We have also talked about the importance of not only knowing what you want to change and why - but *how* you will get there.

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 similar.

Sit down with your Steering Group, and ask them to reflect on:

- Whether the approach(es) being used to deliver the Local Conversation are appropriate or do they need refreshing?
- Who in your Local Conversations understands and practices ABCD, Community Organising, or another formal approach to community development? If there is no-one or very few people, then discuss who can be trained by when, so it can help inform your work?

Have you got any top tips or tricks 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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