

## Why work with community researchers?

### What is community research?

Community research is a participatory research method where people with lived experience of the issues or geographical community being studied take part in directing and conducting research.

Community researchers (also referred to as 'peer researchers') are supported to do this, and may be involved in assisting with research design, developing research tools, collecting and analysing data, or writing up and disseminating findings.

### Why did the London team use this approach?

Community research can be a powerful method, as it enables richer insights to be collected on a topic and can empower people to affect positive change by participating in research on their own communities. It is because of these associated values with the method that the CLEVER Cities London team wanted to implement a community research approach in Thamesmead:

- **We recognised the value of local knowledge and insight:** Community researchers have a deep understanding of the local community, its culture, history, and dynamics, including social, economic, and environmental factors that may influence the regeneration project. This local knowledge and insight are invaluable in capturing nuances and complexities which may not be fully understood by external researchers.
- **We knew the project would be better with local expertise:** Community researchers can provide authentic perspectives and first-hand experiences, leading to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the community's needs, aspirations, and challenges. Their local knowledge and insights can inform the development of more targeted and relevant interventions and help to identify community strengths and assets that can be leveraged for regeneration, as well as potential challenges that need to be addressed. This can result in more effective and sustainable regeneration strategies that are better aligned with the community's priorities and aspirations.
- **We wanted to try to improve trust and relationships:** Community researchers are trusted members of the community. They have established relationships and networks within the community, which can enhance trust and rapport with other community members. Community researchers can bridge the gap between the community and the external researchers or project stakeholders, facilitating communication and collaboration, leading to higher participation rates and increased participation.
- **We wanted to maximise social value by building community capacity and skills:** Involving community researchers in regeneration projects can empower local community members and build their capacity. It provides an opportunity for community members to actively participate in research and decision-making processes that impact their lives. This involvement can lead to increased ownership and pride in the project, as community researchers become advocates and

champions for their community. Additionally, community researchers can develop valuable research and analytical skills through their participation, enhancing their capacity for future engagement in similar projects.

## What did we do and what did we learn?

The London team have therefore worked with community researchers extensively to undertake research and evaluation activities to shape the local programme's design and implementation.

Nicola Murphy-Evans, Programme Manager for CLEVER Cities London recorded this short video explanation about working with community researchers in Thamesmead, with lessons learnt that might support others working on green infrastructure and regeneration projects to make the most of this valuable participatory method:



*Recorded as part of The Young Foundation's Hive conference (2022)*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OCS1xFFF\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8OCS1xFFF_A)

## Where can I find further support on taking a community research approach?

CLEVER Cities project partner The Young Foundation run the [Peer Research Network](#).

This network brings together people who are interested in and involved with community or peer research together, creating a space to connect, share ideas, engage in events and seminars, and collaborate on new work.

[Sign-up to their network](#) to find out more about forthcoming events, guidance and training opportunities (including introduction to peer research and participatory research courses).

The Young Foundation have also published ten active principles of peer research, which can act as guidance when designing and delivering community research projects.

These principles draw heavily on the 10 Principles of Citizen Science, compiled by the European Citizen Science Association, as well a review of almost 50 peer research projects from across the UK, looking at shared principles and best practice.

### Ten Principles for Peer Research

**1. Peer research projects actively involve members of the researched community in the process of generating new knowledge about, or understanding of, their communities.**

Peer research has participation at its heart – allowing members of a community being researched to influence the way knowledge about them is produced and shared.

**2. Peer research projects answer a genuine research question and seek to produce high-quality findings.**

When the need for research is not defined from the outset, there is a risk that peer research can become a resource-intensive training programme for a small number of participants.

**3. Both professional researchers and peer researchers benefit from taking part and gain new perspectives to help strengthen their research practice.**

Peer researchers should take part in comprehensive training before involvement in research projects. They should be adequately compensated for time and expertise contributed to different aspects of the research process and benefit from skills development throughout their involvement. Professional researchers should gain from involving peer researchers at various stages of research design and delivery and be open to having their perspectives challenged along the way.

**4. Peer research projects strive to involve peer researchers in as many aspects of the research process as possible**

Peer researchers can be involved in research and tool design, data collection, analysis and reporting back findings to their communities to ‘close the loop’ and ensure community research is not extractive.

**5. Peer researchers are informed about the impact of their work and how the findings are being used.**

Professional researchers should maintain communication with peer researchers beyond the reporting stage of projects and keep them informed of, and engaged with, plans for sharing findings and any actions that happen as a result of these plans.

**6. Peer research is considered a research approach like any other, with limitations and biases that should be considered and controlled for.**

As with any other kind of research, practitioners should quality assure to ensure that peer research is serious about producing high quality data. Peer research is not suitable for all kinds of research questions and as with other methods, it should be recognised that peer research has limitations and it is damaging to claim that it is the right approach for every kind of project.

**7. Findings produced via peer research are made publicly available where possible with the results published in an open and accessible format for audiences including stakeholders and research participants.**

Depending on the participants involved, it may not be appropriate to share findings completely openly. However, adapting reporting to suit different audiences is key, particularly for share outs with community members who took part in research.

**8. Peer researchers are both adequately compensated and acknowledged in project results and publications and they are actively involved in 'sharing out' findings.**

Where they are interested, peer researchers should have opportunities to develop and deploy presentation skills and be equipped to answer questions about research projects and findings.

**9. Peer research programmes are evaluated for their research outputs, data quality, participant experience and wider societal or policy impact.**

There is currently a lack of evidence about the impact of involving peer researchers in research projects. To build this evidence base, and the legitimacy of peer research as a methodology, practitioners should build evaluation into projects from the outset and be open to sharing learning as well as failure.

**10. The leaders of peer research projects take into consideration legal and ethical issues surrounding copyright, intellectual property, data-sharing agreements, confidentiality, attribution and the impact of any activities on communities.**

To counter the idea that peer research is a less legitimate research methodology than more traditional, established approaches, practitioners should carefully consider legal, ethical and data issues when designing and implementing peer research projects.



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