

Engage your community

There are eight important things to remember that will help you engage learners. If you get them right, you should have no problem getting people into your centre and eager to learn something new

- 1 Listen to your community**

Every community is different, so listen to people and understand who they are. Sit down, have a cup of tea and ask plenty of questions. What would they like to see happen in their community? What is day-to-day life like for them? What challenges do they typically face? If people feel like they have been listened to, they are much more likely to attend your events and support what you are doing.
- 2 Learn what people want**

The way to make sure you provide a service that people will use is to ask them what they want in the first place. What do they need? What aspirations do they have? Speak to as many people in the community as possible and try to find out what drives them. If you can connect on an emotional level, you will quickly find out what you can do to make a difference and get people to your events.
- 3 Adapt what you offer to the community**

Before you run any event or training session, you should check to see if what you offer meets the community's needs. Does the community want it to happen? Will it help people? What are the real-world benefits? For example, a photography class for young mums who'd prefer help with applying for school places isn't much use. It's always tempting to plough ahead when you have an idea, but you should always check that it will have a genuine impact.



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- 4** *Go to where people are*
Every event or training session needs to be in an appropriate setting. Get it wrong and you could put people off. You are trying to help some of the most socially and digitally isolated people in our communities. Find out where they feel most comfortable and arrange sessions there, if possible. That could flats, foyers or portacabins – whatever it takes to get people to come and make them feel comfortable.
- 5** *Help people get social*
Your events and training sessions must promote inclusion from the very start. Organise them in a way that encourages people to communicate – help them make friends as well as learn. Use social networks to reach people and get them talking to each other. Those who are digitally and socially isolated often still use Facebook, so create and share events there. Then ask partners and influencers to share them too.
- 6** *Make your events fun*
There is a good chance that many of your learners will have been out of education for a few years. In some cases, they may have previously struggled with the school environment. Create an environment where people can enjoy the learning experience. Keep it light-hearted and engaging. Your learners are adults with businesses, homes and families, so treat them with respect.



- 7** *Encourage interaction*
If your session is fun and interactive, people will enjoy learning. Don't stand and teach from the front. Be as hands-on as possible and encourage your learners to get involved too. Ask plenty of questions to give people prompts and stimulate conversation. Set tasks to get them using their new skills in a real-world setting. For example, don't explain what an e-mail is – ask them to send one.
- 8** *Be flexible*
Prepare for the unexpected. When you work with the most isolated in a community, you are often met by challenging people in difficult situations. Their lifestyles may be chaotic. Sometimes, they need you to be there and listen with a cup of coffee. It may be that improving their digital skills is far less important than having somebody who will simply listen to them.



Next steps...

The following resources are available on the **Be Connected: Resources** page.

Creating a positive learning experience is a guide with suggestions and ideas to help you break down the barriers to learning, deliver engaging sessions and make sure you're providing the right support to learners.

Preparing for your session will provide you with practical advice which you can use when delivering digital skills sessions to groups of learners.