

COMMUNITY/CITIZEN ORGANISING

what works and the role of community foundations



European Community Foundation Community and Citizen Organizing Nov 2022. Visuals Marina Roa from SenseTribe

The challenges facing civil society are increasing. Global economic pressures are causing increasing polarisation of wealth, changing political landscapes are threatening democratic participation of all citizens and the civic arena (which has long been the space to galvanise and advocate for the those who find themselves on the margins) is diminishing.

However, despite the national and global socio-economic pressures, at the local level people and communities are self-organising for a more just and fairer world. They are combining their collective strengths to create community alternatives to address challenges around the rising energy prices and the climate crisis through community owned enterprises, creating food co-ops that ensure no person goes hungry and developing new systems of democratic participation that enables the voices all people to be heard.

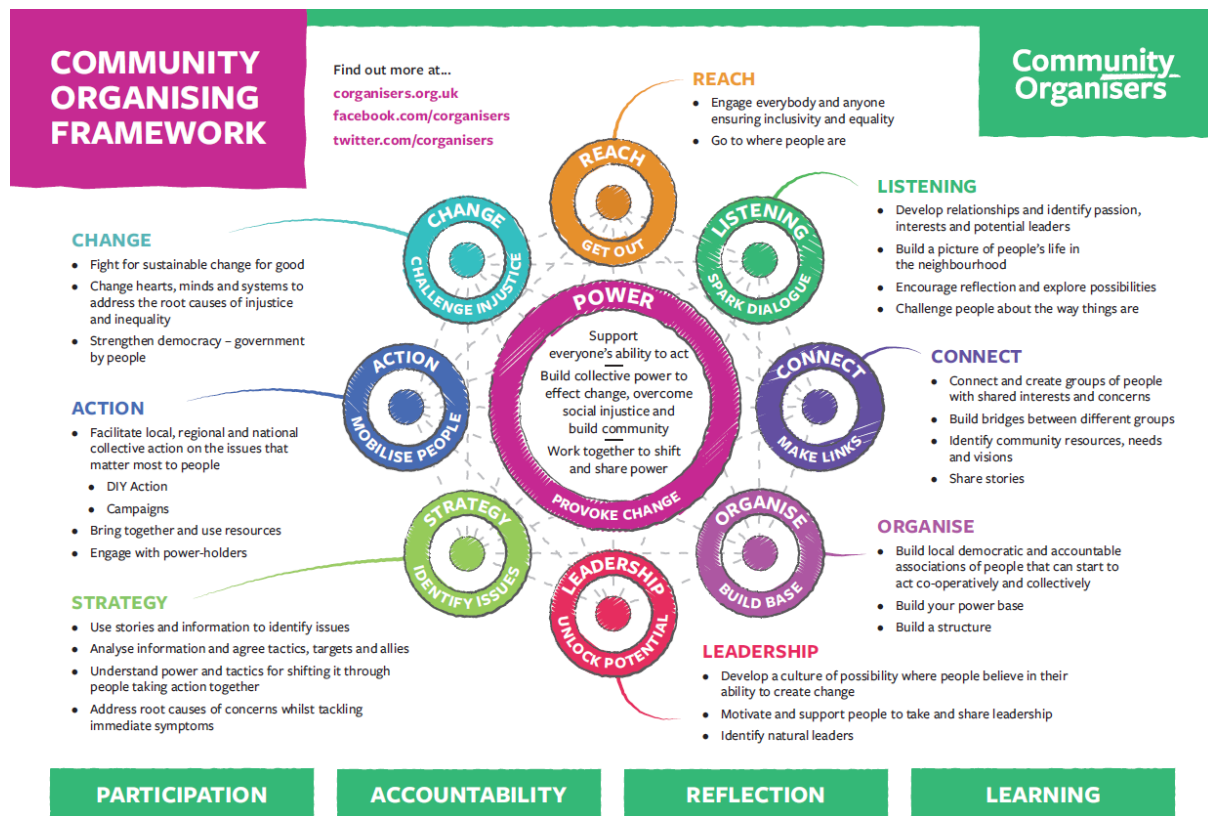
At the heart of this is a desire and need for community / citizen power that is both economic and social. One that relies less on external intervention and more on utilising the resources of people and money held at a local level. The challenge for us all is how do we unlock the power of local philanthropy and the organised collective power of people to bring about social change.

ECFI organised an online meeting on 24th November for community foundation practitioners across Europe - 37 took part from 14 countries.

The aim was to:

1. understand what community / citizen organising is
2. explore the relevance to community foundations and how they engage with/support community / citizen organising

Following a presentation Nick Gardham, Community Organisers, UK, introducing the Community Organising Framework below, there were discussions to explore the role that community foundations can play in galvanising and catalysing grassroots social change, highlighting examples of successful actions and challenges that need to be overcome. These are presented in respect of each dimension of the framework.



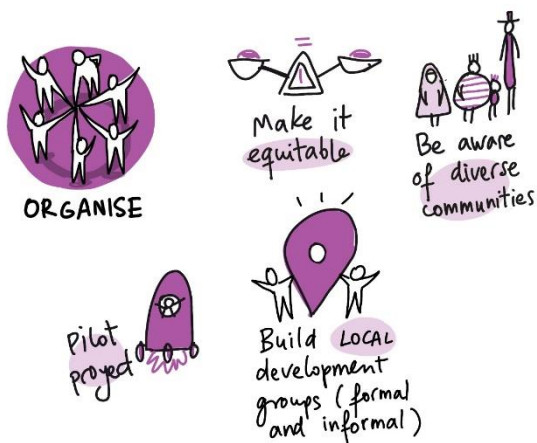
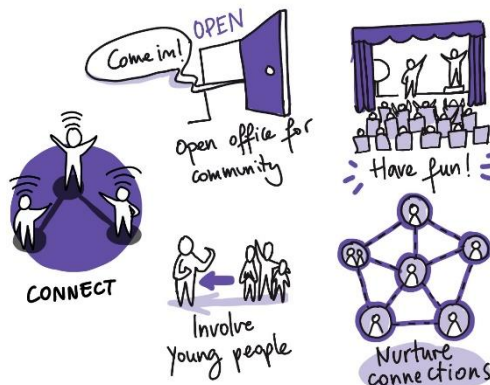
Source: <https://www.corganisers.org.uk/what-is-community-organising/our-framework/>

The starting point is to ensure reach into communities, by raising awareness and building trust. Innovative ways that community foundations have ensured inclusion include use of local radio and productive activities such as cooking together.



The next step is to Listen and to build an understanding of needs, concerns, interests, ambitions. This involves being out in communities and bringing local community representation into the community foundation. The right to listen has to be earned.

Connecting should be deliberate and nurtured. Think in particular about how young people can be involved and the potential for inter-generational and inter-sectional connections. Make connecting fun as for example the involvement of citizens in the production of an opera in Barcelona.



Then think about organising - with formal or informal groups, ensuring there is equity and diversity. Support pilot activity if appropriate.

There is always the question of who should lead. In some cases, the community foundation can itself take a lead but more often it involves the community foundation providing financial and other support to empower local group leadership.



When thinking about strategy (which has been derived from community insight) be aware of expectations and be careful not to over-promise and beware of what the role of the community foundation is and that community organising and campaigning can be appropriated by people with political motivation.



Help mobilise people to act, and encourage collaboration. It was noted that community foundations themselves had been the product of community organising.



Seek to achieve systemic change that potentially can have an impact at scale and for the long term.