

Ways to get to know communities

This worksheet provides advice for artists/cultural practitioners on how to get to know communities at the beginning of a residency.

Start by trying to get a better understanding of the community:

Talk with the project manager to identify a link person who can show you around and introduce you to key people.

Talk to key people in the community to gather their knowledge and experience.

Make yourself familiar with your surroundings by visiting local shops, cafés, faith organisations and other places where people gather.

If you are going to live in the area, consider staying with a host family in the community rather than a hotel or guest house.

Look for community classes, activities and events that you can join or attend, or opportunities to volunteer on an existing community project.

Don't rush things at the start. Take some time for the community to get to know you before you start on arts activities.

Be prepared to share information about yourself and your project and be open with people.

When you start to plan your activities, try to take these activities out to people where they naturally meet.

Make the first few activities fun and easy to engage with.

Include food and drink if you can. You might even start a regular coffee morning that includes community arts cultural animation activities.

Make sure you publicise your first activities well. (See the resources on publicising your residency in Book 3, pages 7-9).

Tools & resources

For background research on the community, look at the websites for national statistics. Some property search engines also have useful information about area statistics and local information.

Help & advice

Local community members, educators, social workers, health professionals and religious leaders can give you information and advice on how to get to know the local community.

Research the demographics of the community (looking at factors such as age, education, nationality, religion and ethnicity).

Look for community websites or social media groups, join them and contribute to them.

Read local newspapers, community newsletters or magazines.

Think about...

... how you will build listening into your first few activities? If you can, provide lots of opportunity for participants to tell you how they want to engage in arts activities, or try a few different arts activities to see which are most popular. Try to be flexible in your plans, so that you can respond to feedback.

Top tips

Don't start by photographing people and places in the community without their permission. This can make you seem like a tourist or an intruder in the community.

Do start by connecting with people on a personal level and taking the time to explain who you are and what your residency is about.

The Community Toolbox has a very good set of information, tools and case studies for assessing community needs and resources:
www.ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment