

# Community events

This evidence briefing will help support your conversations with customers, grant-holders and other stakeholders.

It shows how community events contribute to the conditions that enable people and communities to thrive.



The National Lottery Community Fund supports people and communities to thrive through projects that are people-led: ensuring that individuals are meaningfully involved in the things that affect their lives and communities.

Our villages, towns and cities have places and spaces where good things can happen, and where we can build meaningful relationships and connections with others. Strengthening individual wellbeing and resilience enables people to live fulfilled lives.



## What do we know about the role of community events in thriving communities?

Bringing people together to celebrate, take part in a shared activity, or get to know their neighbours is a good way to help communities to thrive. Although events are short-lived they can still make a difference to the wellbeing of people and communities.

Participation in events is linked with higher levels of personal wellbeing, as well as better relationships and connections, and people getting involved in activities that make a difference to their communities.

## What does the evidence say?

### How events can enable people-led outcomes

Events can increase people's sense of pride in their local area.

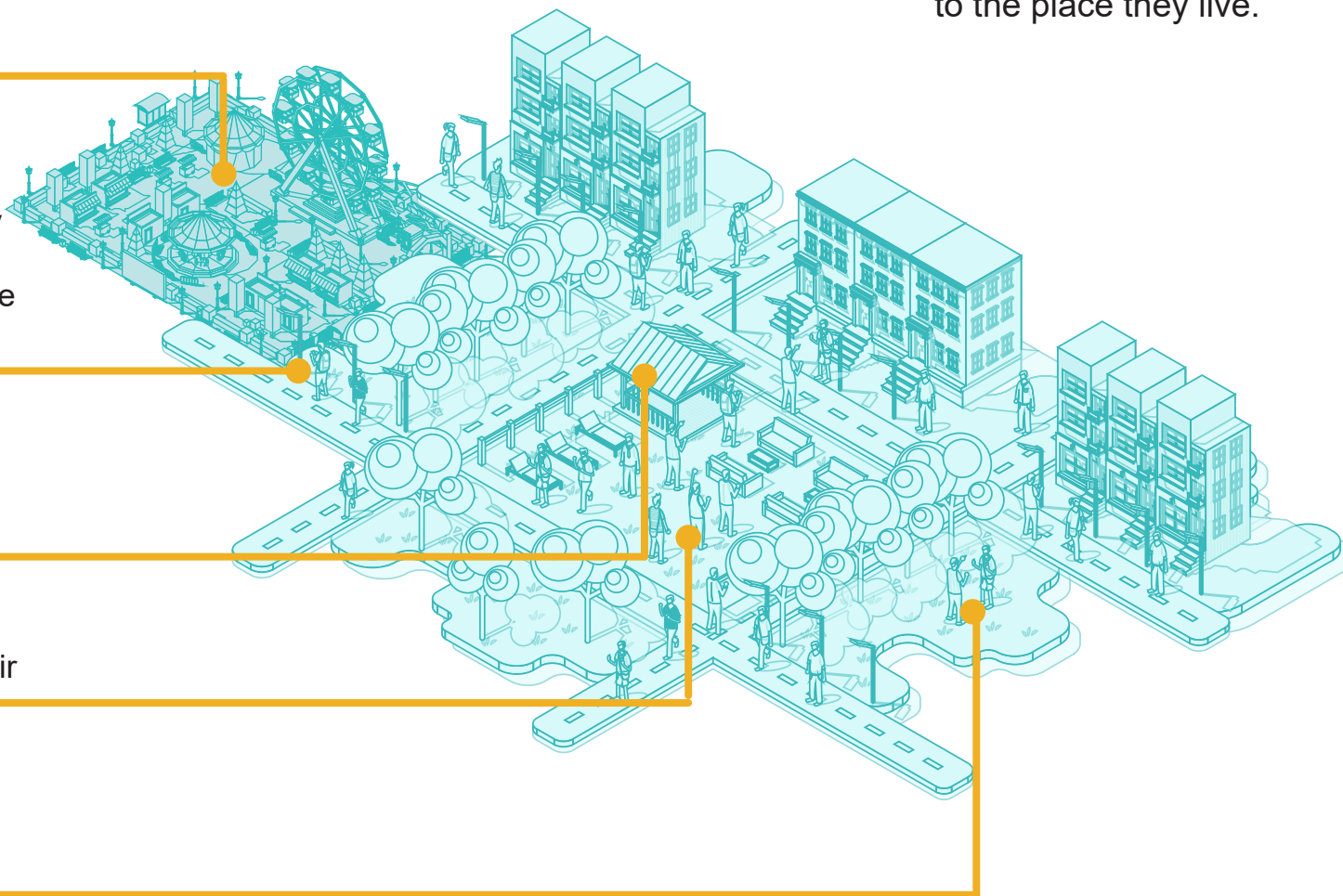
Events and festivals can help people connect to the culture and heritage of a place. This is especially the case for events where people can learn about each other, exchange knowledge and share their heritage and culture.

Events and temporary uses of space can help encourage people to come together to make a difference on the things that matter to them.

Taking part in community events can encourage people to volunteer in their community.

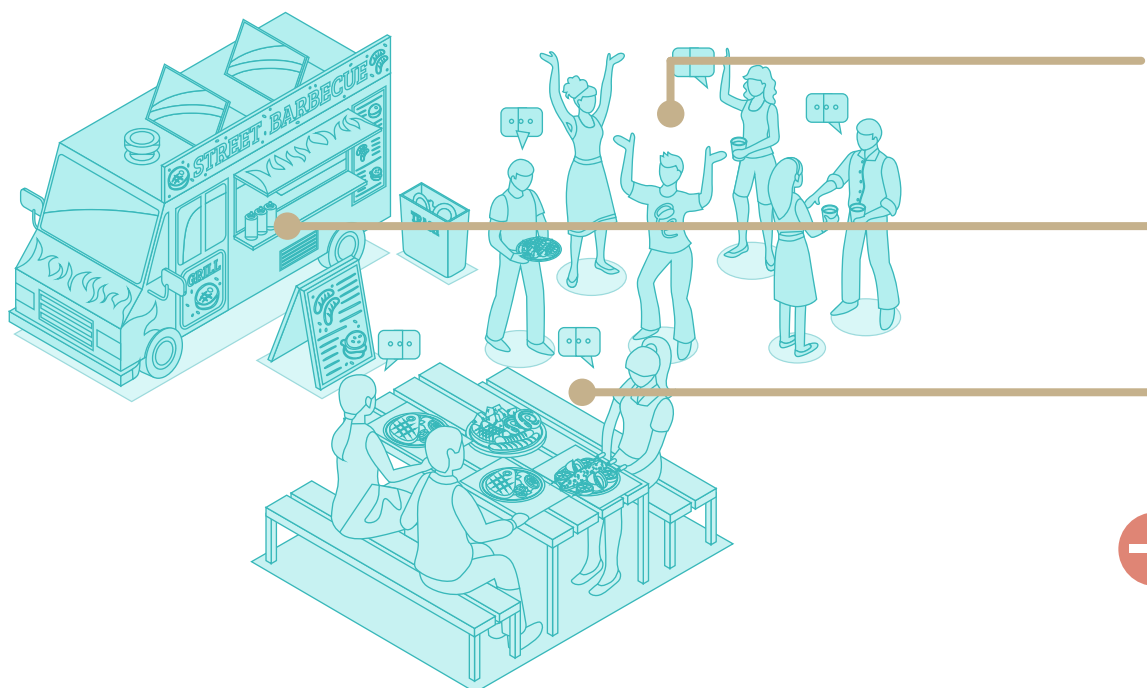
Where an event encourages social interaction it can contribute to an increased interest in the wellbeing of others in young people.

**Taking part in events can help support people to take the lead and get involved in their community.** Events can provide a first opportunity for people to meet others around a shared aim and can help encourage people to get involved or feel connected to the place they live.



**Events are an opportunity to bring people from across the community together.** They can help people get to know their neighbours and form new friendships, and can help people feel less isolated.

## How events enable relationships and connections



Events can provide a neutral space for different groups to socialise, and a hub for people to meet which can improve social relations in the community.

Neighbourhood events like street parties and festivals can help people get to know their neighbours and build a sense of community spirit.

Taking part in events can help to reduce feelings of isolation and encourage social mixing.



**However, big crowds are not necessarily the best way to encourage meaningful new friendships.**

**Evidence from one project suggested that shared meals for a small group of people were better at addressing loneliness than large coffee mornings which people found daunting.**

## How can I use this evidence in grant making?

### 1 Think about how events can support longer-term change

Events can have a positive effect on personal and community wellbeing, so they are worth supporting in their own right. However, the effects may not last unless they are reinforced by other activities, such as follow up sessions for smaller groups, or opportunities to get involved in planning future events or building on the activities in some other way.

Help projects think how they can build on the benefit of a one-off event, for example by harnessing the new feelings of purpose in the community to encourage people to get involved in volunteering locally.

New social connections made during events may need nurturing. Encourage projects to plan for how people can be supported to continue friendships after the day is over.

### 2 How an event is run makes a difference

Events can take a number of different forms - from music festivals, street parties to sports days or even car boot sales.

Although they may look very different, events that are successful at delivering community outcomes share a number of

features:

- they provide activities that bring people together around a common focus or action
- although they may be aimed at the whole community they also target specific groups which may not usually take part
- they are often co-produced with a target group or allow for some level of participant control.

### 3 Help projects to evaluate their impact

Measuring the community impact of a one-off event is difficult, and there is a temptation to over-state the benefits and using inappropriate measures.

For example, community events on their own are unlikely to produce lasting impact on someone's satisfaction with life, or feelings of loneliness – so using these measures in an evaluation of the day is not going to produce reliable findings. These are still good measures to use where an event is part of a series of activities that build those longer-term changes.

Projects can still help show evidence of their effectiveness by collecting appropriate information during the day, and by using follow-up activities to measure longer-term change.

On the day of the event it's possible to measure who attended (inclusivity), how they felt about the day (positive experiences and emotions), and whether their behaviour changed during the event (for example by social mixing, physical activity, or creative activities).

In the weeks and months following the event projects could capture



whether these experiences led to deeper engagement or sustained change, such as people building on new social connections, taking on new or more volunteering, or improved attitudes about belonging and trust. Attributing long-term changes to a single event depends on having a clear theory of change which links the event to these benefits through other actions or interventions.

Some longer-term outcomes to measure include: people's sense of belonging and trust, neighbourliness, social mixing and social support. Robust and tested measures for these outcomes are available in the Understanding Thriving Communities Measures Bank.

# 4

## Collect data during an event

There are a number of different ways to capture useful data during an event which can help identify the benefits it has produced for a community. These simple approaches are suitable for one-off activities and events:

- For example, **photographs** can capture a range of information: whether the participants represent the diversity of a place, whether people mixed with others, whether people take part in activities that help improve wellbeing. Photographs shouldn't be seen as a robust method of collecting data for impact, but they are a proportional and rich source of information for one-off events.
- **Feedback forms and surveys** are a good way to learn what people valued about an event, and can help organisers plan for future activities. As well as capturing information about who attended, they can ask people for their feelings about the activities they took part in.

- **Mood trees** are a creative way to capture information about people's feelings during the day. But organisers need to bear in mind that feedback given in a way that others' can see it may not be as honest as that given in confidence.

## Case study: Celebrate UK

The Celebrate programme helped 1,714 communities across the UK to celebrate their achievements. This programme was created when a poll showed that six out of ten people said they couldn't remember ever coming together to celebrate with their community. Celebrate set out to change this. Some celebrations focused on national events, such as The Queen's 90th birthday, while others provided fun and food, such as Wheatley Hill Community Association's Pancake Day celebrations.



## Celebrate in Northern Ireland

Kabalikat in North West is a small group set up by members of the Filipino community in Derry/Londonderry and the surrounding area to celebrate and promote their culture and to combat isolation. Kabalikat is the Filipino word for solidarity.

They received a £4,500 grant from Awards for All to hold the first Filipino lantern festival in Derry/Londonderry, bringing some sparkle to the city and celebrating its friendliness and diversity. The Lantern Parade was a free family event, with traditional Filipino dance and food, as well as music and games.

Jonah Atos, the group's project coordinator, said: "The lantern festival was a chance for us celebrate our culture and share it with people outside our community who came along and experienced our traditional food, dance and music."



## Where can I find out more?

This briefing was developed from research carried out by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing and Happy City in 2019, as well as from the Fund's own bank of case studies.

To find out more visit:

- [NLCF Knowledge Bank](#)
- [NLCF Evidence library](#)
- [Thriving Communities research report](#)
- [Measures bank](#)
- [What Works Centre for Wellbeing website](#)
- [Happy City website](#)