



ENHANCING THE IMPACT OF LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS

TOP TIPS TO HELP COMMUNITY GROUPS IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF THE WATER ENVIRONMENT

Across the UK, hundreds of community groups are all working towards a shared aim - to improve the health of the water environment. They differ in size, shape and structure but their work is essential and has contributed to countless river and stream improvements, as well as benefited the people and wildlife that rely on them.

Enhancing the ability of community groups to get involved with on the ground projects, as well as influencing decision-making, will mean that change is not only accelerated but will be longer lasting.

This guidance is designed to help catchment partnerships identify the opportunities to work with community groups to increase their capacity, influence and impact.

1. Inspire, excite and simplify

Often community groups can be unsure about how they can engage with the water environment and really make a difference. Catchment partnerships have a key guiding role to play as to the range of opportunities and barriers to delivery of work on the ground, whilst also ensuring that associated technical information is understandable by all.

Catchment partnerships could create platforms to enable groups to influence policy and implement legislation, such as the Save Our Waters campaign, which provided a means for communities to contribute to a government consultation on river health. They could also make accessible information readily available by using alternative formats - such as infographics or video content.

Once groups have easy access to relevant and clear information, they will be more empowered and therefore better placed to become more involved, and eventually influence their target audiences. This will enable them to diversify the range of issues they become involved in.

2. Train groups to become citizen scientists

Citizen science is a fast growing and exciting area, enhanced by recent advances in data collection techniques including water quality kits and mobile phone apps. Robust, quantitative data and evidence collected through recognised techniques enables community groups to be much more effective at lobbying for specific actions in their catchment, and increases the chances of sourcing funding for projects. In short, citizen science offers a tangible, flexible and cost-effective way for groups to get involved and make a difference.

There are numerous ways groups can use data, such as upload it to specific websites and share online; create maps showing real time information about the health of a catchment or stretch of river; or document the impact of a particular intervention and use it to engage other groups, authorities and decision-makers. The Riverfly Partnership has shown that citizen science data has a real impact – it triggers action from the Environment Agency if something is amiss with respect to water quality.

Catchment partnerships can support community groups in citizen science and increase their ability to collect, monitor and interpret data. This can be achieved by producing tools and guidance, running virtual training and workshops, linking with existing initiatives such as the Riverfly Partnership and sharing data packages.



Citizen Science and Volunteer Monitoring

A guide to help increase understanding of water management issues by signposting to apps, tools and equipment that can be used.

Download a copy:
www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/volunteer-monitoring



The Riverfly Partnership

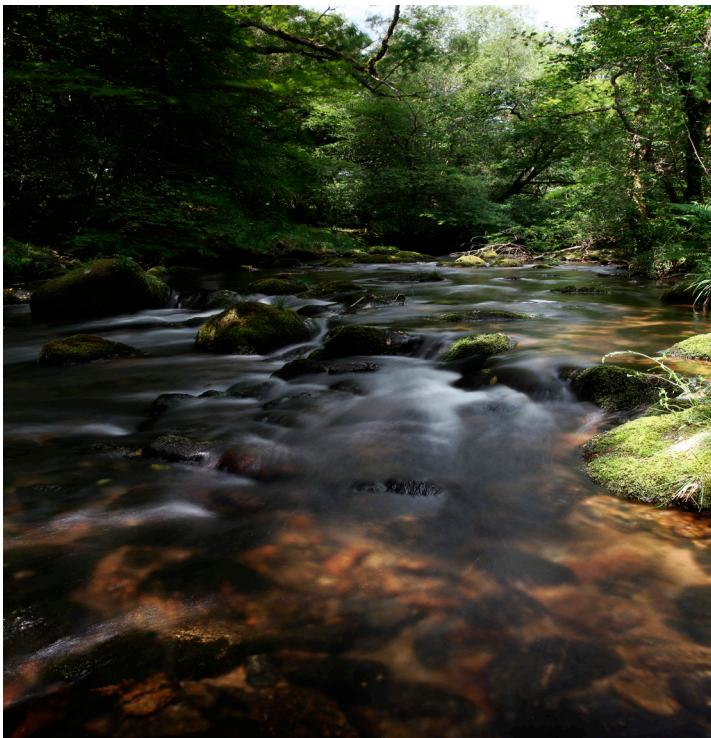
A network of organisations working together to protect and improve the water quality of UK rivers, increase understanding of riverfly populations and conserve riverfly habitats.

www.riverflies.org



3. Work together to identify and submit funding bids

Securing funding and resources can be limiting factors to community groups being able to engage, influence and have the impact they would like. Identifying sources of funding, and then submitting successful applications is time consuming and requires skill. However, catchment partnerships can overcome these barriers by working with community groups to either submit joint funding proposals, as well as upskilling groups so that in time they are able to submit their own.



4. Identify 'change agents'

There are key individuals within the Environment Agency, water companies, farming community and business that can have a significant impact in identifying solutions to catchment issues, as well as driving changes in the approach to protecting the environment as a whole.

These individuals can be thought of as change agents – they are knowledgeable, have the ability to influence, and understand the public benefit of an improved environment.

Catchment partnerships will be able to identify these individuals and should work with community groups to help them understand how to approach and work with them too.



5. Collaboration is key

Partnership working has many benefits – it enables groups to share expertise and skills, leverage additional funding and increase the impact on the ground. Community groups often look to work with larger organisations, such as national NGOs and catchment partnerships, to improve their ability to influence.

Catchment partnerships should actively support this collaboration as they are best placed to provide groups with experience of engaging and influencing. Over time, community groups can build up their reputation and skills and may be in a position to take greater responsibility.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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