



# UNDERSTANDING WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH THE WATER ENVIRONMENT

## FIVE TOP TIPS TO ENGAGE THE PUBLIC

Individuals and local communities play a crucial role in improving the water environment. From volunteering and campaigning to monitoring water quality, their involvement is essential.

These five top tips will help organisations engage with the public, and encourage them to get more involved with the water environment.

### 1. Understand your community

Most people have an affinity with rivers. To encourage them to move from enjoying their river to becoming more involved with it, invest in finding out more about who lives in the catchment - students, retired people, families, school pupils - and what might influence them.

For example, in urban areas, support and affinity with rivers and the natural environment is likely to be lower. However, people that already take part in an activity connected to the river (such as rowing or fishing) are more likely to want to do more. Therefore, organisations could work with existing groups to reach these people.

Significant life events, such as retirement or parenthood, can change people's perspective and prompt them to take a greater interest in their environment. This is a good opportunity to engage with them.



### 2. Develop a varied offer

Most people lead busy lives. To encourage more people to engage, offer a diverse range of activities to suit different lifestyles, interests and skill sets - from litter picking to monitoring water quality, and taking part in consultations and local planning.

Straight-forward, practical tasks, such as litter picking or balsam bashing, are normally favoured. This means that catchment partnerships may have to put more resource and effort into engaging local communities to take part in other activities that are slightly less appealing - such as getting involved with the planning process or collecting data.

Currently, there is strong recognition and support for the Catchment Based Approach. However, that support is fragile, dependent on catchment partnerships taking tangible action that makes a difference on the ground.



## Guerilla knitting

The Leicester Riverside Rangers group teamed up with the Belgrave Knitters to clean up the Willow Brook, a tributary of the River Soar. Knitting was combined with litter picks and resulted in a series of woolly fish, eels and flowers being created to decorate a bridge over the Willow Brook.



## 3. Get the message right

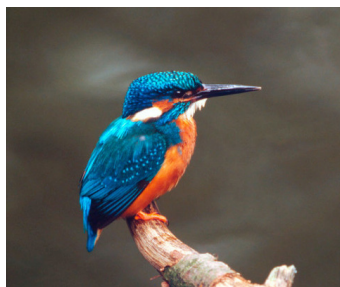
Reasons for not getting involved with the environment are diverse and so it is important to use messages that are relevant and resonate with your target audience.

Although we know that many rivers are in trouble and face a multitude of pressures, this message may not motivate individuals and groups to get more involved. Indeed, many people significantly over-estimate how many of our rivers are healthy and are simply not aware of the reality.

Focusing on the wildlife that river habitats support, as well as emphasising rivers as places to relax, unwind and enjoy, is likely to resonate and be more effective.

**Wildlife**  
No unpleasant smell  
Banks not eroded Entertainment  
**Plants** Beauty Fresh  
Life Sparkle Animals  
Crayfish Fun Swimming Reeds  
Frogs Clear water  
Nature Ducks Oysters  
Green Flow  
Pleasurable  
Flowing  
Untouched  
Trout and salmon  
**Otters**  
**Birds** **Fish**

Words triggered when thinking about a healthy river.



## 4. Keep it local

People have a vested interest in improving their local area, and often feel this is where they can make a difference. Talking about national problems and initiatives could be off-putting and create a barrier to people engaging. Make a clear link between a national issue or initiative and the local river.

Many people really care about their local river and will quickly be put off by the idea of a talking shop, or having to fill in a lot of paperwork and not get anything done. This can be overcome by making sure activities are action-focused and that the benefit to the local river and area is clear.

## 5. Communication, communication, communication

People lead busy lives and are resistant to signing up to receive different newsletters or talking to lots of different organisations. Those already part of a group prefer to receive news and information about activities via their existing channels.

However, whilst digital communication can be very effective, don't be afraid to get out and talk to people. Displays at local shows, fetes and festivals, and visiting existing groups, or inviting them to talk at partnership meetings, can really bring issues to life and help raise awareness about new audiences.



### FURTHER INFORMATION

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WORKING WITH  
COMMUNITIES,  
BUSINESS AND  
GOVERNMENT FOR  
HEALTHY RIVERS



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