



Growing business together Workshop guide for local authorities

Aimed at businesses in local parades and areas, the idea is to start conversations and encourage groups of businesses to work together. Across the country we've seen examples of areas that have achieved an incredible amount by businesses pooling their resources, working together and reaching out to their local community.

Why bring businesses together for a workshop event?

- **Inspire** businesses with ideas they can take back to their area and start working together
- **Share** best practise techniques and experiences between groups of businesses
- **Engage** with businesses that you have had little to no previous contact with

"Holding a pilot conference in York for the Growing Business Together project was a fantastic opportunity.

Our event was aimed at businesses in 'hard-to-reach' areas, and those who we had not previously had contact with. We found that Google Streetview is a fantastic tool to explore the streets quickly and find businesses to invite.

Getting the business community involved in the workshop from the beginning was key. Working alongside existing business networks and local associations we contacted and invited range of business.

The workshop itself was lively, engaged and created a really positive and proactive atmosphere. The group of business representatives who attended were all really keen to meet again as a group, so we're now already planning another event."

Nathan Vasey, Business Engagement Officer, City of York Council



Tips for organising your 'Growing Business Together' workshop

Venue

It could be a hotel, function room, community hall or even an empty shop, just make sure presentations can be shown. It is important to ensure the venue is accessible and parking is available if necessary.

Invitations

Create a simple invitation to send to businesses and encourage them to share it with others. Be sure to invite members from existing local business groups and associations; it's unlikely these people will have been in a room together before.

Timing

The best time to hold the event for businesses is around 6.30pm, mid-week, not in the school holidays and avoiding typically busy trading periods in the year.

Format

The event should feature at least three speakers who can talk about the advantages of businesses working together. Ensure the group are given plenty of opportunities to discuss their own ideas and issues. Allow for networking time at the end.

Speakers

Does your area have a business association that achieved successes by working together? Getting a representative along to share their story and tips is a great way to inspire others.

Opportunities

Make sure people sign-in to the workshop with contact details. This will allow you to follow up any conversations with individuals or the group as a whole.

What an agenda might look like

An initial agenda needs to allow for plenty of discussion during the workshop. It is also advisable to include a speaker from an already successful and established business association or group. This person can tell their own story and share their tips and advice. Other speakers may be from business development networks or a sector expert.

At our event we kicked off by asking the delegates to get into pairs and talk about what they felt was the big problem in their area and then feed back. This triggered some really useful conversations and debates. We also did another exercise where we told the delegates we were giving them £5,000 and they had to brainstorm quickly on what they would do with it. There were so many great ideas that came out of this and it showed everyone that taking the first step towards helping their high street is easier than they thought.

The challenges you may face

Bringing together business representatives who have not previously been engaged with is not always easy. If you have a speaker from a successful business group on board, it may be an idea to ask them to contact other businesses and invite them to the event.

The benefits of working together

Businesses see a range of benefits when working together, such as the ability to collectively organise events and pool resources to promote an area together. By bringing representatives together from different areas and groups, they can be encouraged to share best practise techniques. Networking will allow these representatives to connect with each other, and ideally gaining contacts that they can call and meet with for future advice and support.

