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Guidance

Community champions programme: guidance and resources

Published 4 July 2022

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This resource was developed in partnership with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Aim of this resource

This document provides an overview of evidence, guidance and resources to inform and support those designing and implementing community champions programmes in local areas. This includes a range of settings including local authorities, health and social care, and the voluntary and community sector (VCS).

Role of community champions

Community champions (also known as health champions) are community members who volunteer to promote health and wellbeing or improve conditions in their local community. Champions use their social networks and life experience to address barriers to engagement and improve connections between services and disadvantaged communities. [\[footnote 1\]](#)

Community champions are key connectors in communities and their work can help to address health inequalities, both in the context of short-term emergency response and longer-term health promotion and prevention. [\[footnote 1\]](#)

Community champions are individuals with credibility in target communities and who can tap into existing social networks to help bridge the gap between services and communities. [\[footnote 1\]](#) [\[footnote 2\]](#) Recruiting champions from communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 could help reduce barriers to engagement and support uptake of services, including vaccination. [\[footnote 3\]](#) In this context, community champions are likely to be effective where trust in formal services is low. During the pandemic, community champions have been versatile and, when resourced appropriately, can support decision-making, use community structures for service provision and share tailored information to different communities. [\[footnote 6\]](#)[\[footnote 7\]](#)

Longer-term, champions could support recovery work, strengthen community cohesion, emergency preparedness and wider work to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health disparities.

Potential models for developing champion approaches

Champion approaches are public health interventions that can be applied flexibly, dependent on local needs and community assets [\[footnote 4\]](#).

In UK public health practice, approaches include (but are not limited to):

- empowerment approaches where champions build active communities – co-design and citizen-led action leads to greater individual and community empowerment
- capacity building approaches where champions are change agents in their community – a network is built of champions, who offer community leadership and use their circles of influence to connect with others in community and workplace settings
- strengthening participation approaches where champions widen participation – champions act as connectors to increase engagement in healthy activities and community events
- integrated approaches where champions link services and communities, working alongside professionals to support service delivery and increase uptake – outreach and signposting are key activities
- health education approaches where champions are primarily messengers or involved in community-based campaigns [\[footnote 1\]](#)

These approaches are not mutually exclusive, and programmes can use elements of different approaches simultaneously.

There is also extensive learning from overseas where similar approaches have been used successfully in communicable disease prevention and control:

- popular opinion leaders – champions who are well-placed in social networks to promote health and risk reduction as part of their daily lives – recruiting from marginalised communities can help reduce any stigma associated with risks
- community mobilisers – champions who are part of comprehensive, multi-level approaches to prevention [\[footnote 1\]](#)

In the UK, community champions have been involved in different ways in supporting local pandemic responses. Roles have included:

- information provision and communication of messages
- consultation and knowledge exchange including offering insight into community needs
- collaborations based on partnership working and shared decision making [\[footnote 6\]](#)[\[footnote 7\]](#)

Enabling factors for community champion programmes

Based on evidence reviews [\[footnote 1\]](#)[\[footnote 2\]](#) and in-depth research in 3 local areas, [\[footnote 6\]](#)[\[footnote 7\]](#) enabling factors to consider when developing champion programmes include:

- building a supportive infrastructure for champions
- having a collaborative and non-hierarchical relationship between organisations and champions
- valuing community knowledge and experience – important attributes for community champions include being seen as trustworthy and respected, being representative of and/or having knowledge of local communities, access to existing networks with reach into seldom-heard communities
- having open, inclusive recruitment to ensure champions reflect their local communities, going beyond traditional community leaders
- providing training for staff and champions that builds practical skills and competencies as well as theoretical knowledge.
- facilitating peer support for community champions to support one another, for example, to share best practice and ask questions
- meaningful investment into programmes, both in terms of time and resource – realistic timescales are needed for delivery of activities
- embedding programmes within wider-scale, long-term community engagement strategies – building trust and 2-way flow of information is important
- linking programmes into wider partnership working across local places – there is an increased sense of co-production and ownership at a local level when champion programmes have been developed with community partners from the outset
- programmes should be flexible and community-led, enabling them to respond to new challenges and divert resources as required – they should have a clear goal, but the route to achieve that goal should not be prescribed – this will allow programmes to be responsive to the needs of local communities
- strong, supportive leadership at both local and national levels
- measuring impact – there can be challenges with access to data and targeted support may be needed to improve data flows to and from communities

Champions programmes can face challenges. It is important to recognise that time is needed to build trust and to incorporate principles of autonomy, flexibility and community-led support within programme activities to ensure champions retain authenticity within their communities.

Champions programmes should be based on an understanding of the wider determinants of health and their impact on individuals and communities. At a practical level, this means addressing issues that may cause barriers such as financial disadvantage. Long-term development of champion programmes should be part of taking a whole system, community-centred approach to public health. [\[footnote 5\]](#)

The DLUHC Community Champions Programme in depth research [\[footnote 6\]](#) [\[footnote 7\]](#) with 3 areas identified a set of community engagement principles that can be applied to increase vaccine uptake:

- micro-knowledge, where champions utilise local knowledge of individuals that are reluctant to engage and support
- open dialogue with a non-judgmental stance
- embedding information on health behaviours in broader forms of support
- face-to-face and virtual care
- micro-messaging, where champions have a deep insight and understanding of dialogue and debates in their communities
- insight into invisible barriers that were not otherwise visible to statutory services
- social animators creating connections in their neighbourhoods
- autonomy and flexibility of programmes leading to a more diverse pool of champions
- using connections with other champions and organisations to generate an amplifying effect
- having a coordinator role to maximise programme aims

Benefits of community champion programmes

When supported appropriately, community champions can: [\[footnote 1\]](#) [\[footnote 6\]](#) [\[footnote 7\]](#)

- increase knowledge, awareness and understanding of issues
- successfully undertake outreach and engagement activities
- provide practical guidance to increase physical and psychological capabilities
- increase use of community insight to address barriers
- facilitate open 2-way dialogue around any concerns community members may have

- work with champions from different areas or groups to promote cohesion
- generate a sense of agency with mutual learning and cooperation

There is consistent evidence (pre-pandemic) that being a champion was associated with physical or mental health and wellbeing benefits. [\[footnote 1\]](#)

Organisational benefits of community champions programmes include: [\[footnote 6\]](#)
[\[footnote 7\]](#)

- improved links between local authorities and communities, leading to greater social coordination and effectiveness of policy and increased capacity and effectiveness of supporting vulnerable groups
- increased capacity of local authorities and clinical commissioning groups to deliver services and share learning from practice in terms of what works
- potentially reduced national and local NHS costs in the long-term (by supporting health-seeking behaviours of the public)

Further resources

Below are further resources and information relating to the programme themes identified during the COVID-19 community champions programme.

Recruiting champions

General guidance and information on recruiting volunteers and case studies on how the local COVID-19 community champions programmes undertook recruitment:

- [National Council of Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\): help and guidance hub](https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/) (<https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/>)
- [Do It: free online resource for advertising \(and searching for\) volunteering opportunities](https://doit.life/volunteer/find-volunteers) (<https://doit.life/volunteer/find-volunteers>)
- [Volunteering matters: top tips for recruiting volunteers](https://volunteermatters.org.uk/volunteer-recruitment-getting-word-out) (<https://volunteermatters.org.uk/volunteer-recruitment-getting-word-out>)
- [LGA COVID-19 Learning Exchange: Community Champion Case Studies](https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange) (<https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange>)

Practice example: Arun District Council community champions

Arun District Council community champions aimed to build wider reach and trust with local Black and minority ethnic residents.

During lockdown the initial recruitment was digital and through pre-existing networks. This included partners recruiting from existing members, volunteers and service users, advertising as a volunteer opportunity via the volunteer hub and social media and through partner meetings and via word of mouth.

Most champions were already volunteering with partner organisations and there are also organisational champions who are in employment. A role description and code of conduct were written with help from Voluntary Action.

Training and supporting champions

The Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH) has been providing training qualifications for health champions for many years. They have trained 60,000 health champions across the UK to date.

The RSPH Health Champion training provides the learner with an understanding of health improvement across physical activity, healthy eating, mental health support, signposting to local services and COVID-19 for young health champions. Training materials and practice examples have also been collated during the pandemic.

RSPH accredited qualifications:

- [Health Champions \(https://www.rsph.org.uk/qualifications/health-champions.html\)](https://www.rsph.org.uk/qualifications/health-champions.html)
- [Young Health Champions \(https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/programmes-hub/young-health-champions.html\)](https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/programmes-hub/young-health-champions.html)
- [COVID-19 Young Health Champions \(https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/programmes-hub/young-health-champions/level-2-award-for-covid-19-young-health-champions.html\)](https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/programmes-hub/young-health-champions/level-2-award-for-covid-19-young-health-champions.html)

Other training resources

- [Training slide sets on NHS Futures community champions workspace \(https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/view?objectID=28772624\)](https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/view?objectID=28772624) include: introduction to behaviour change, health inequalities, participatory methods: principles of community engagement, participatory methods: community engagement with organisations.
- [NHS webinar on training and support in community champions programmes \(https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/view?objectId=25317104\)](https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/view?objectId=25317104)
- [Local Government Association COVID-19 Learning Exchange: community champion case studies \(https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange\)](https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange)

Practice example: Gateshead COVID Community Champions

Gateshead COVID Community Champions focussed on building capacity through adapting their weekly Making Every Contact Count sessions. They developed and implemented a rolling programme of 6 training modules alongside wider briefings, social media awareness and resources.

The modules covered understanding COVID-19, understanding vaccines, terminology for community involvement, behaviour change to remain COVID-19 safe, understanding testing and NHS test and trace and case investigation. It was delivered mainly virtually but also adapted to other situations.

Covid Community Champions event r...



Engaging and communicating with champions

General guidance and information on engaging and communicating with volunteers and case studies on how the local COVID-19 programmes communicated with champions:

- [National Council of Voluntary Organisations \(NCVO\) help and guidance hub](https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/)
(<https://beta.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/>)
- [NCVO Know How: involving volunteers](https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/coronavirus/volunteers)
(<https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/coronavirus/volunteers>)
- [Charity Comms: five ways to boost your communication with volunteers](https://www.charitycomms.org.uk/five-ways-to-boost-your-communication-with-volunteers)
(<https://www.charitycomms.org.uk/five-ways-to-boost-your-communication-with-volunteers>)
- [LGA COVID-19 Learning Exchange: Community Champion Case Studies](https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange)
(<https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange>)

Practice example: COVID-19 community champions programme

Many of the community champions programme coordinators regularly communicate with the local champions using a range of approaches.

During the pandemic common methods were via a WhatsApp group, email, weekly or bi-weekly Zoom or Teams sessions for updates, insight and feedback, learning and training. Importantly, communication is 2-way between champions and professionals. A range of formal and informal mechanisms are used and information is supplemented with handouts and resources.

Monitoring and evaluating champions programmes

Relevant guidance and information to support monitoring and evaluating VCS programmes and case studies on how the local COVID-19 community champions programmes are measuring success:

- [Public Health England guidance on evaluation in health and wellbeing](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-in-health-and-well-being-overview)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-in-health-and-well-being-overview>)
- [Better Evaluation website](https://www.betterevaluation.org/) (<https://www.betterevaluation.org/>)
- [UKHSA Evaluating Digital Health Products](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/evaluating-digital-health-products)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/evaluating-digital-health-products>)
- [What Works Wellbeing: Evaluating Wellbeing](https://measure.whatworkswellbeing.org/)
(<https://measure.whatworkswellbeing.org/>)
- [Webinar on monitoring and evaluation of community champions programmes](https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/view?objectId=26209296)
(<https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/view?objectId=26209296>)
- [LGA COVID-19 Learning Exchange: Community Champion Case Studies](https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange)
(<https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange>)

Practice example: Bradford and District community champions programme

Bradford and District Community Champions programme monitors all champion activity. Champions complete electronic bi-weekly reflection logs and monthly monitoring forms. Grass-root and faith partners also capture bi-weekly outputs and outcomes with both quantitative and qualitative data, such as number of active champions, number of individuals engaged, kinds of activity, issues and concerns raised.

Case studies and images from activity and events are also collected. Formal feedback from partners is considered by commissioners.

[Further information on Bradford and District community champions programme](https://engageourplace.uk/community-champions)
(<https://engageourplace.uk/community-champions>)

Sustaining the champions programme

Relevant guidance and information on programme management and scaling:

- [government resources on project management](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/project-and-programme-management)
(<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/project-and-programme-management>)
- [Public Health England research on taking a whole system approach to community-centred public health](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-centred-public-health-taking-a-whole-system-approach)
(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-centred-public-health-taking-a-whole-system-approach>)
- [NAVCA resources on the role of VCSE in local service and systems for health and wellbeing](https://navca.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing) (<https://navca.org.uk/health-and-wellbeing>)
- Public Health England article on [Sustaining and Strengthening community resilience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32820710/)
(<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32820710/>)
- [LGA COVID-19 Learning Exchange: Community Champion Case Studies](https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange)
(<https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange>)

Practice example: Kensington and Chelsea, and Westminster community champions

The [Kensington and Chelsea Community Champions programme](https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health/community-champions#the-community-champions-programme) (<https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health/community-champions#the-community-champions-programme>) and the [Westminster Community Champions programme](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health/community-champions) (<https://www.westminster.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/your-health/community-champions>) have been operating since 2008 as an asset-based community development approach to improving health and wellbeing.

There are 12 projects in total across the two local authority areas. It was initially funded through a Lottery programme then by the public health department, through the Public Health Grant. It receives joint funding from the local clinical commissioning groups and housing providers.

The programme is largely delivered in each neighbourhood at a project level by local VCS organisations. There is an overall programme manager with a team of project managers who are skilled in community development and volunteers.

Four major independent evaluations and smaller impact studies have shown the cost-effectiveness of the programme.

Further information:

Online networking spaces, practice examples and key organisations.

- Future NHS Workspaces:
 - [community champions \(https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/\)](https://future.nhs.uk/CommunityChampions/)
 - [vaccine equalities \(https://future.nhs.uk/NationalCOVID19VaccineEquality/\)](https://future.nhs.uk/NationalCOVID19VaccineEquality/)
 - [equality & health inequalities \(https://future.nhs.uk/EHIME/\)](https://future.nhs.uk/EHIME/)
 - [homelessness & inclusion health \(https://future.nhs.uk/HomelessHealthCOVID19/\)](https://future.nhs.uk/HomelessHealthCOVID19/)
 - [working in partnership with the VCSE sector \(https://future.nhs.uk/VCSES/\)](https://future.nhs.uk/VCSES/)
- [LGA Covid-19 Learning Exchange \(https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange\)](https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange)
- [OHID Healthy Communities Knowledge Hub \(https://khub.net/group/phe-healthy-communities/\)](https://khub.net/group/phe-healthy-communities/)

Case studies and practice examples:

- [LGA COVID-19 Learning Exchange \(https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange\)](https://khub.net/web/lga-covid-19-learning-exchange)
- [LGA COVID-19 Good Council Practice Case Study Hub \(https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/coronavirus-council-information-and-support/covid-19-good-council-practice\)](https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/coronavirus-council-information-and-support/covid-19-good-council-practice)
- UKHSA Knowledge and Library Services: [Practice Example Collection on Community-Centred and Asset-Based Approaches \(https://ukhsalibrary.koha-ptfs.co.uk/practice-examples/caba/\)](https://ukhsalibrary.koha-ptfs.co.uk/practice-examples/caba/)

Key organisations:

- [Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities)
- [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-health-improvement-and-disparities\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/office-for-health-improvement-and-disparities)
- [UK Health Security Agency \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-health-security-agency)
- [Royal Society for Public Health \(https://www.rsph.org.uk/\)](https://www.rsph.org.uk/)

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