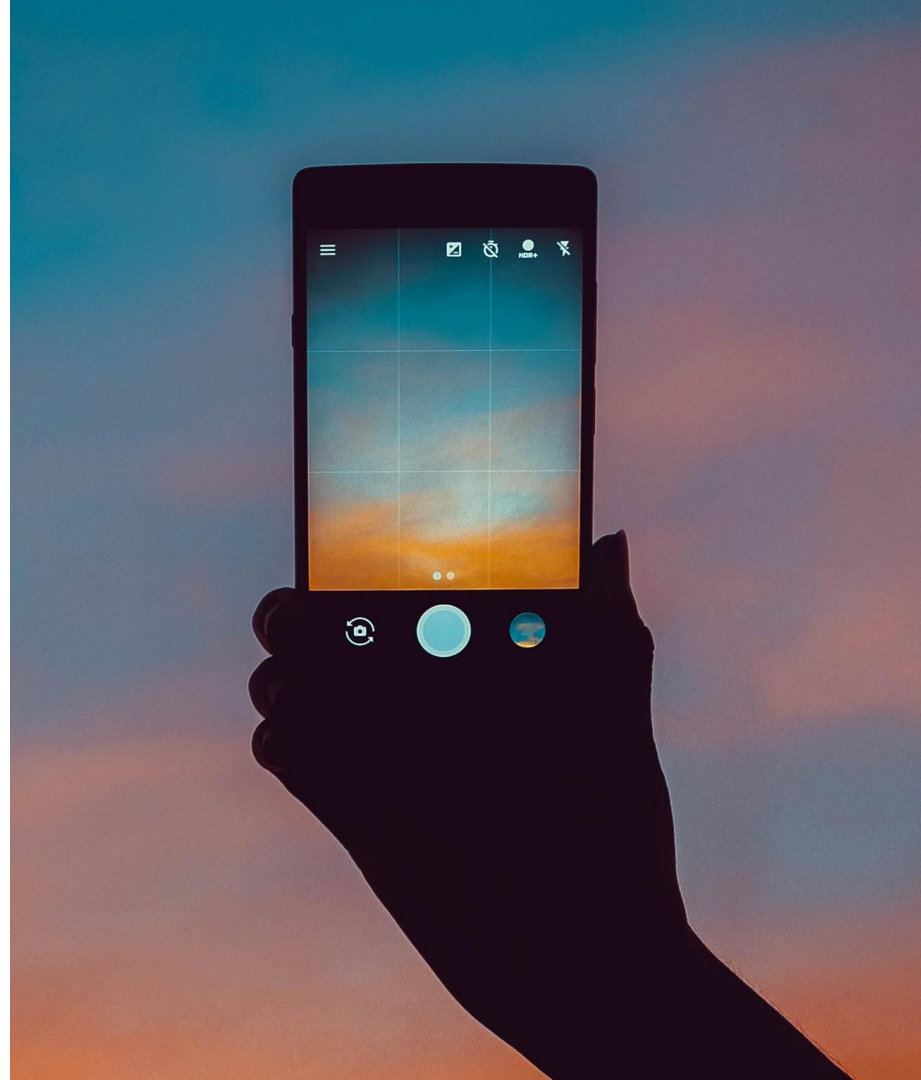# Roadmap: How to build a community for your eParticipation project

Participation is about opening up decision-making to a group of people. It's an invitation, but not every invitation is accepted.

That's why engaging people in the participation process is key: building a community around your project ensures high levels of participation and yields good results.

Why is a community so important?

A community is not a single gathering and it lasts for a certain period of time

If you manage to build a sustainable community, you will be able to share ideas and collaborate on your projects.

Participation requires participants. Having a network that helps you activate interested youth is essential.

Participants may vary from project to project, but a stable network helps you to continuously address issues.

It's important to establish links to decision-makers, supporting organisations, multipliers etc. from an early stage to make sure your results count.

How to do it?

Have a look at the **Roadmap to building a Community on OPIN**

The following step-by-step guide provides instructions on how to create a community around your participation topic.

The Roadmap is based on the experience of the community of eParticipation practitioners that was built for peer-to-peer exchange through OPIN

Core steps

Set goals and purpose

What is the topic of your project? What do you want to achieve?

Identify target groups

Who are the youth that are involved/ interested? Multipliers, stakeholders?

Make out benefits

Define the goals and incentives of the community.

Build a home

Where and how will the community meet?

Plan activities

What exactly will you do and when?

Kick off

Start with a bang

Community activities and management

Sustain and evolve

Set goals and purpose

- Consider what you want to achieve in your project: What is your goal?

    EXAMPLE: the OPIN Community aims at strengthening eParticipation across Europe through peer-to-peer exchange.

- Add clear and concrete objectives and activities.

    EXAMPLE: the OPIN Community wants to: 1. provide an infrastructure/forum for giving advice to members on their projects, for sharing experience, tricks and lessons learned; 2. obtain 30-40 members of community, of which 10 are active; 3. strengthen the European network of eParticipation practitioners

Identify target groups

To answer the question "Who do you need to reach?" it's best to take a three-step approach:

1: COLLECT AND MAP

2: GET TO KNOW

3: PRIORITISE

Think strategically but be practical!

Identify target groups

1st step: COLLECT AND MAP

Find one or two "local heroes" – influencers who are passionate about your goal and can help you motivate and activate community members

Identify at least 2 names for each category

Brainstorm and write down potential categories

TIPS: Talk to your local heroes and consider their advice. You can use their feedback to adjust your project goals.

TIPS: Think about people you already know and are in touch with. Warm contacts open doors more easily.

TIPS: youth clubs, schools and teachers, other educational institutions, youth information centers, municipality staff, government officials, youth organisations, civil society organisations…

Identify target groups

3rd step: PRIORITISE

It's important to find a balance between the openness and specificity of the community's purpose.

It is helpful to differentiate between primary (must-have) and secondary target (nice-to-have) audiences:

Primary

Your primary target audience is who you have to reach in order to breath life into your community.

EXAMPLE: for the OPIN community, accomplished eParticipation practitioners were considered primary as their input was crucial for peer-to-peer exchange

Secondary

Your secondary target audience is less important for your project but still to be considered.

EXAMPLE: Newbies were considered a secondary target audience as they bring in valuable questions

Identify target groups

2nd step: GET TO KNOW
Getting to know your potential community members is crucial for designing activities and building a home for the community.

MAKE OUT BENEFITS
As soon as you know who you want to reach, think about what you can offer to your target audiences.

- How can you encourage them to join?
- How they can benefit from being part of the community?

TIPS:
- *Create an online survey and invite the mapped stakeholders (your potential participants) to join the community.*
- *Ask for their wishes (e.g. concerning your participation project) and discuss specific topics.*
- *Short conversations or interviews can help clarify expectations, incentives and make the design of activities easier.*

DIGY OPIN Erasmus+

Make out benefits

EXAMPLE from the OPIN Community :

Target audiences	Benefits and incentives for community members
Primary	- Exchange with like-minded community - Opportunities for new collaborations - Getting **answers** quickly from knowledgeable crowd - Dissemination channels - Creating bonds with decision makers (a voice in policy) - Participation in organized events and trainings - Ideas for starting new projects
Secondary	- Accessing interesting information - Free and interactive learning (practical "learning by doing") - Expressing fresh ideas, their innovative mindset, creativity - (International) networking

Build a home

Find a place where the community can gather and exchange ideas: It can be a forum, a regular meeting (online or offline), a social media channel… depending on your community. Use what suits your purpose best!

OPIN
offers a dedicated module for peer-to-peer exchange with initators from all over Europe: the community forum → *https://opin.me/en/projects/opin-community*
Have a look!

Plan activities

Activities bring the community together and allow for exchange.

- Schedule project-related activities and find your rhythm (weekly, monthly, on specific occasions…)
- Make sure you take your community's needs into account. Use little surveys and informal communication to get a feel for your members' needs.

Kick off

When you launch your community, make sure you go on stage fully prepared. After all, first impressions matter.

- Make yourself be heard: invite members and advertise your community

- All beginnings are exciting, but they also require effort: stir the conversation and be extra responsive on your community forum to prove its effectiveness.

- Be persistent, innovative, try new things and be open to new discussions.

Community Management

A community is an ongoing endeavour. After planting the seed in the kick off, continuous care through community management helps your community grow.

- Be swift and responsive.
- Ask young people to engage in the community management. Share communication tasks with your partners.
- Stay in touch with the community and continuously ask for their wishes. Change is constant and you can be sure that debates will not be centered around the same hot topics.
- Invite interesting members (experts or decision makers) to the community to keep discussions innovative.
- Evolve with your community and let it grow.

Community activities

Consider different activities, formats and communication channels according to the community's needs:

- Exchange in face-to-face interactions: project meetings, workshops, brainstorming or training sessions where everyone can learn from each other
- Online meetings and webinars
- One-on-one exchanges
- Moderated discussions in a forum
- Distribute knowledge through newsletters, mailing lists or social media
- Marketplace for cooperation: start new projects together, apply for funds with community members

Community activities: Series of Online Meetings

EXAMPLE : To attract members and communicate within the OPIN Community we organized online gatherings. 1-hour monthly webinars included an input on interesting experiences and lay the groundwork for an exchange of ideas among the community members afterwards. New topics for further meetings were collected from the community to develop the format collaboratively

A structure for the OPIN Community Webinars was prepared:

1. **Challenge and topic of the meeting**: What is the topic of the input and why it is interesting? What is the challenge?
2. **Input on a solution or a good practice example:** How was the challenge solved? What was good about the examples?
3. **Questions and answers**: Which questions do the participants have and need to be clarified in the group discussion?
4. **Networking and exchange:** Discussion in small groups (breakout rooms for up to 4 people) to get to know each other, exchange of contact details in the chat.
5. **Feedback:** Comments and new topics for upcoming meetings.

Community activities: Series of Online Meetings

EXAMPLE: Check out the first six OPIN Community gatherings online:

Introduction to OPIN Community and input from SAFY, Slovenia

VIDEO

A brief introduction and presentation from Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth about how to digitise a Children's Parliament in Slovenia using the online participation platform OPIN.

eParticipation tools on OPIN

VIDEO

The developers of OPIN explain how to use OPIN and its eParticipation tools and how to run a successful digital youth participation project.

How to build a successful network

VIDEO

Youth Horizon from Georgia share experiences on how to build a successful network before starting an eParticipation project. Including decision-makers, schools, youth organisations and local institutions in a strong network is vital for setting up a project.

Community activities: Series of Online Meetings

EXAMPLE: Check out the first six OPIN Community gatherings online:

Activation and registration processes

VIDEO

Activation and registration processes can pose difficulties to practitioners. The webinar was dedicated to an exchange on challenges and good practices as well as brainstorming new solutions.

Consultation process on OPIN (Youth policies)

VIDEO

Using OPIN and its text review tool to engage young people in the consultation process of the National Youth Policy in Malta was presented by Agenzija Zghazagh.

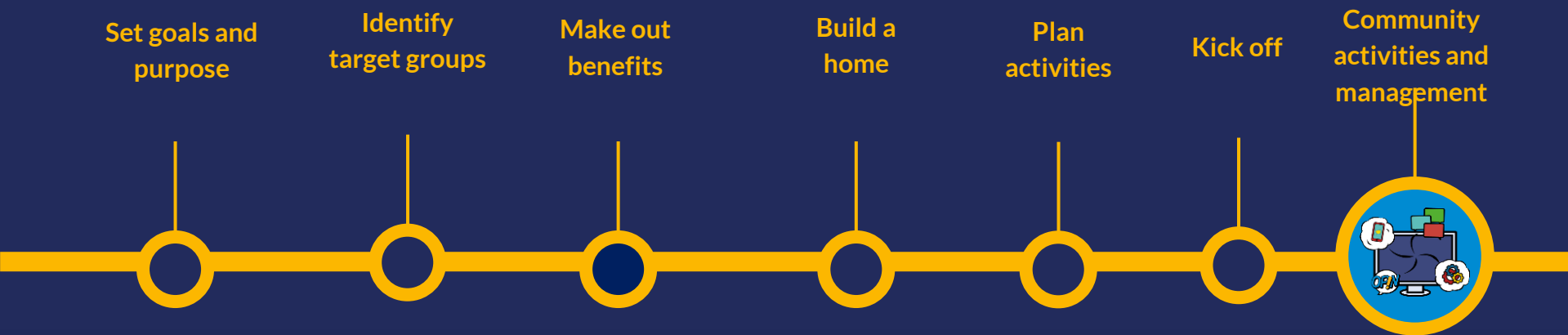## Tips and tricks to involve young people

VIDEO

5 important tips on how to involve young people in the participation process and enable better communication across target audiences.
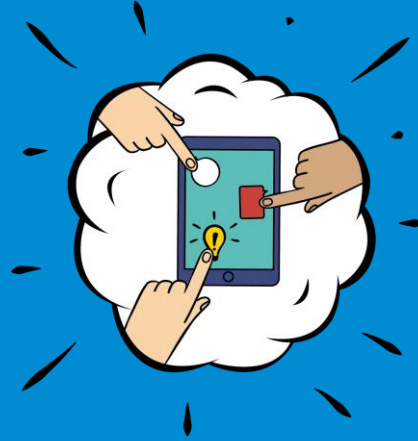
Start your own community

Now is the time to apply the community-building process to your own project!
Get in touch if you have questions: community@opin.me

Set goals and purpose

Identify target groups

Make out benefits

Build a home

Plan activities

Kick off

Community activities and management

Participation is about opening up decision making to a group of people.
It's an invitation to them. Building a community is about making people stay.