



No. 10b: Reaching out to the wider community - Young People

Introduction

One of the problems facing many civic societies is how to involve young people, both in terms of active participation in the activities carried out by societies and also in terms of fostering an interest in the built environment and related matters. Societies need to ensure their own survival. Very often, societies are faced with an ageing and declining membership and complain about the difficulty in attracting younger people. In this sense, many societies would be relieved to see people in their twenties and thirties enrolling as new members. The focus of this Advice Sheet is however, young people of school age and immediately above.

Engaging young people is a crucial concern to ensure that the societies themselves have a future (today's youngsters are tomorrow's committee members) but it is equally important that societies should be aware of the concerns of young people and that young people have an avenue through which to channel their views about the place they live in a meaningful way. Civic societies can be an ideal vehicle for facilitating community engagement and for establishing a dialogue between younger people and planners and developers.

One possible side benefit of involving young people is that you may also capture the attention and involvement of their parents and other family members – providing a potential source of new members!

The challenge today

Young people are increasingly locked into a busy routine of schooling, national curricula, pre- and post-school activities, homework and family obligations and commitments that make the thought of adding any new responsibilities somewhat daunting for them. If your society is to engage their attention, you need to add value and offer them something that is unique, relevant and interesting.

Are civic societies unique? Very definitely! No other national movement is so focused on the topics that civic societies traditionally address such as planning matters, the built environment and architectural heritage. Societies are uniquely placed to promote an interest in these and related subjects and to be a single source of information and advice on these matters within the local community. The challenge for societies is to capitalise on this by offering tangible benefits with which young people can identify.

Can societies be relevant and interesting to today's young people? Again, yes! But it will take work, co-ordination and imagination. By organising competitions, projects and education campaigns aimed at young people, by appealing to their concerns or linking into the national curriculum, it should be possible for societies to share their knowledge and generate enthusiasm in our built heritage and environment. Overleaf are some practical pointers to assist you.

Challenge

Suggested steps to take/points to consider

i. Does your society run a membership scheme for young people? Do you encourage parents to take out family membership which offers positive benefits for their children?

Practically speaking, young people are not going to have a great deal of money to spend on society membership subscriptions and other activities. So you may need to think about low-cost or no-cost schemes for young people, particularly those of school age. You may be able to get funding for one-off projects targeted at young people.

If you run a family membership scheme, do you include anything in the products and services you offer to your members that is targeted at the children of adult members? For example, do you produce a young persons' newsletter?

ii. Do you run activities specifically for young people?

You might consider guided walks, treasure hunts or competitions linked to the built environment, etc., for young people. Involve their parents as well if possible. Consider the timing so that you are not clashing with national exams, for example, or so that you are taking advantage of school holidays when young people (and their parents!) might be glad of the opportunity to do something a little different.

Consider offering illustrated talks to local schools and youth groups. Again, try to make these interactive if possible. You are more likely to get into schools if you can find a link to the school curriculum for the age group you are targeting. Your local education department may be willing to advise, offer contact details for local schools, etc. Remember on the day to provide literature about the society and membership forms so that children can take something home for their parents to read.

Consider linking your activities for young people with national campaigns such as Heritage Open Days or Green Flag Awards so that you are making a link with the Civic Trust and can utilise their marketing and promotions to help put your message across.

Remember that young people are likely to be very familiar with the internet and IT. Use modern media to communicate with them. Make sure your website is attractive and well designed. If it is old fashioned and clunky to use, young people will form a similar impression of the society itself.

iii. Do you seek out the views of young people

If you don't ask, you'll never know. Consider asking young people what they think about developments in

within your community on planning and development matters? Do you know what concerns young people in your area?

your area. What would they like to see happen? What do they think works well and what should be pulled down? What is their view about the facilities provided for young people in the area? Are there any amenities that you could help them to campaign for?

Approach youth clubs, colleges and schools with flyers and survey forms. Be prepared to collect responses rather than relying on them being posted back to you. Run an electronic survey on your website. Consider using other community websites to engage in debate on community issues of interest to young people.

iv. Do you encourage young people to take an interest in the built environment and other matters?

Consider holding exhibitions and providing literature designed for and targeted at young people. Your local gallery and museum service may be willing to help. Enlist the support of your local newspaper or radio station to help promote the event.

Run some planning workshops for young people about real subjects to find out how they would make things better if they were in charge. Their ideas might well add new light on your own perspective!

Other points to consider

Always, when dealing with young people, whether or not they are members, be aware of health and safety issues and make sure that your society has adequate public liability insurance in place in case of mishap (the Civic Trust has negotiated a low-cost policy for societies).

It is increasingly important to think about the duty of care you owe to young people. You may well find that some organisations will expect members of your society who work with children to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check. If you regularly run schemes for young people and work with volunteers, whether or not they are already known to you, you may need to consider asking for such checks to be made. Details on the procedures to follow are available from the Criminal Records Bureau website (see below). Having parents present, or a qualified teacher where events are run in school premises, will be an option to explore. You may also wish to seek written authority from the child's parent or guardian for the child's involvement in any project or competition you are organising. Also, be alert to the potential issues around taking and publishing pictures of children. Again, a parent or guardian's permission might be something to consider.

For more information, try the following websites:

Criminal Records Bureau

www.crb.gov.uk