



Grow your community hub

**a community toolkit
for growing resident-led
involvement**





In “community hubs” research led by United Way, it is recognized that while there is no standard definition for what a community hub must look like (indeed, hubs can form in all types of community spaces, either indoor and outdoor) - research shows that hubs tend to share three things in common:

- (1) On-site partnerships often help with resources,
- (2) Collaborations broaden the collective impact,
- (3) Hubs have a large amount of resident-led involvement.

We recognize the importance of partnerships and collective impact. However, to launch our “Grow Your Community Hub” project, this Toolkit has been created for our not-for-profit members with a focus on (3) resident-led involvement, as a way to start the “community hubs” conversation.

All information in this Toolkit has been researched and presented using feedback, insights, and inspiration provided by our community association leaders.

The development of this Toolkit was supported by the knowledge and participation of many people. Dozens of inspiring community leaders answered surveys, met with us in person, and volunteered for interviews. We would also like to thank our generous supporters, who made this all possible:

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Message from the Federation



Each year, we are proud to work with the leaders, staff, volunteers, and members of the Calgary community association network, and other not-for-profit organizations who make a difference, every day, in our city. Our community leaders are incredible, and Calgary is greater because of the work you do:

- You offer programs and services for social, recreational, and educational purposes
- You bring residents together, helping neighbours meet and get to know each other
- You celebrate special, local things that make each of your communities unique
- You help residents be heard, and use opportunities to be a voice for community life
- And you make yourself open to the greater public, for all of Calgary to enjoy!

More than 20,000 volunteers work to support their local community associations every year, with 1,800 volunteers serving on different boards of directors. Collectively, we are 20,000 volunteers strong! This is the largest volunteer network in all of Calgary, working towards a common goal. We believe, because of the broad range of work you do to serve residents, celebrate communities, and connect with partners and authorities, that it would be hard to find a single Calgarian who has not benefitted from the work of our community associations.

We also hear from community leaders, staff, volunteers, and members about challenges you face:

- You want more residents to buy memberships – so you know people are listening
- You need more volunteers to support you – so you can share your work and thrive
- You turn to your peers for new ways of doing – so you can keep up with changing interests
- You require resources, from people to money, and assets – so you can grow and be strong
- And you know communities are changing – so you’re looking for ways to change too!

To help with some of these challenges, we are launching our “Grow Your Community Hub” project. This project is the Federation of Calgary Communities’ contribution to the [Enough For All](#) strategy: poverty reduction based on the belief that “my neighbours’ strength is my strength.” Communities *already* have many of the things we need to thrive, so it’s important that we think about our role in community building, so nobody gets left behind. In order to help build healthy, vibrant communities, it is important for all residents to feel a shared sense of belonging.



We would like to start a new conversation about “engagement” and what it means.

Community leaders try lots of different ways to engage residents, user-groups, and the public. However, vibrant community hubs aren’t just “busy,” they are community spaces which show a large amount of resident-led involvement. Whether a hub is a community centre, an outdoor park space, or a local community hot-spot (like a coffee shop or dog park!), residents *want* to be there, *choose* to be there, and *help steer* the direction of how the community hub is used. Community hubs are partly created by the natural way people engage in any type of space, because of their sense of attachment to that space. We believe our community associations are well-positioned to be hubs for community life!

We invite you to consider how you can be more “hub-like,” and to rethink engagement and community work as *relationship building*. Community hubs are vibrant spaces, and we invite you to think about the benefits this work could bring to your organization: not only to strengthen your wants, needs, and requirements listed above, but for the benefit of all residents – so nobody gets left behind.

Welcome, to “Grow Your Community Hub.”



Grow your community hub



Part one

What is a hub?

Check out the video at:

calgarycommunities.com/hubs





What is a hub?



Community associations are the heart of Calgary communities. They bring residents together, provide ways to get involved in local life, and much more. People come together every day, but many people feel differently about what “community” means. What is it to be a part of a community hub? What is a hub?

“Community hub ... for me what comes to mind is a few things. One is like a physical space and one is kind of where people gather naturally ... a place where people can come together easily and actually start talking with each other.”

- Omar, Beltline



“A hub by its very nature is *community*. It might have services and components, but an association has this kind of expectation of form that I think hubs don’t necessarily have. It’s a space people care for, on their own terms.”

- Colin, Parkdale



“A place where people feel like they can go without a prerequisite, where they can just pop in and stop by with no excuse or no purpose, other than just wanting to be there.”

- Sonja, Haysboro





Being a community association is one thing, but transforming your space into an energized “hub” is a bit different. Hubs are resident-led, based on a feeling of attachment to space, one that’s welcoming and inclusive, and has a gravitational pull.

“What makes a hub? People don’t necessarily need to be likeminded, only likeminded in the sense that they’re looking to better other peoples’ lives.”

- Jean, Southview



“People who come from places that aren’t exactly that fortunate ... come here, and it’s really just a great place for people to know their neighbours, meet their neighbours, and just build those connections.”

- William, Edgemont Youth Press





“A hub combines resources, ideas, and people **in a central space, in a way that **makes things accessible**, it **breaks down barriers**, and increases abilities for people to connect.”**

- Pete, Sage Hill



4 major ways you can turn your community space into an energized hub:

Find out why people love different spaces in your community. Where do people naturally go? Why do they go there? What's special about these spaces? How can you capture what is special that will have a "gravitational pull?"

Invite people to join. It is a relationship you are building. It takes time and patience, but payoffs can be huge, like people who come back, and step up to volunteer.

Not all barriers are obvious. Make a list of things you think block people from participation, and see if there are small changes you can make for how, where, and when you do things.

Don't be afraid to take risks! Hubs are resident-led community spaces — when a resident brings a great idea, try and find a way to say “yes!” Perhaps ask them to take a lead role.



20 Great Ideas for Creating an Energized Hub!



Start Two-Way Conversations



Make yourself known

Don't be shy! Be loud, proud, and open about how you're there for people. Community groups are all busy, but take the time to self-promote. Residents don't know what you don't share!

TIP: many communities make "I love my community" swag (buttons, t-shirts). Have fun with it!



Invite residents' ideas

Invite people to bring their own ideas on how to use the community space. If residents don't see themselves in what is being offered, they're less likely to get involved.

TIP: if you're willing to ask for feedback, you should be willing to consider how you'll act on it.

Turn Space into Place



Invite residents to gather

Invite people to host their own gatherings – maybe they didn't realize they could use the space in different ways. Think beyond normal rental opportunities, and offer free, appealing timeslots.



Host fireside chats

To start conversations and help connect people, try hosting a series of chat groups where people from all backgrounds are invited to come and join friendly, non-agenda meet-and-greets.

TIP: these could be held anywhere – at a community hall, park, restaurant, coffee shop, or pub!



Keep track of how people use space

Do you have an out-of-service basketball net, even though another court is busy one block away? Or a back-door that people prefer to use in your building? Follow a natural use of space.



Move your offerings around

Think about the geography of your community, and how far some residents might live from the "main space." Use different spaces, so people can connect with your community association closer to home, and it's walkable.



20 Great Ideas for Creating an Energized Hub!



Create New Relationships



Find or create informal networks people can join

Lots of people like informal networks that speak to them personally, with shared interests. Think about networks you can grow to spark peoples' interests, and send out invitations for meet-ups. Or connect with and build relationships with existing networks in the neighbourhood.

TIP: networks can be based on shared activities, interests, causes, supports, identity, or for fun!



Create a “needs and wants” program

People like sharing, and connecting on personal levels. Offer a way for people to connect in two-way sharing so you can help grow networks of supporters in new and unexpected ways.



Make a creative “relationship map”

Try to give people some context by mapping out WHO you are, WHERE you're located, and HOW people can find you in relation to their home, neighbourhood spaces, and community.

TIP: newsletter art, website graphics, or community murals are fun ways to engage local artists!

Remove or Improve Physical Barriers



Identify barriers in your space that are NOT welcoming

Do you have a building with a confusing entrance? Perhaps an onsite contact who is hard to find? First impressions are important, try and make your point of contact clear and positive, whether it's a person or just a place where people can hangout.



Teach people about different ways they can travel to you

Lots of people do not drive, and rely on other transportation. Think about how people access you, so you can promote ways for people to reach you: a cycling trail, an easy bus route, etc.



Rethink what “accessibility” really means

Many spaces are not wheelchair friendly, but just because a space is flat or has a ramp, doesn't mean it's easy to use. Ask someone who has insights they can share, to see barriers differently.



Safety checkup

People won't gather where they don't feel safe. Walk around your community space, and ask yourself if it feels inviting, or if it feels like a place you would want to spend your personal time.



20 Great Ideas for Creating an Energized Hub!



Cleanliness checkup

Similar to a “safety audit,” people like to spend time in nice spaces. Clean properties and rooms, organized supplies, fresh paint, bright and natural light, public art: cleanliness is important!

Seek Inspiration!



Find the “buzz” and connect with local, hub-like spaces

Promote yourself at different physical spaces people like to visit, where they gather naturally. This could be indoors or outdoors, try and connect your identity with locally-celebrated life.



Partner with other hub-like groups

Similar to “find the buzz,” maybe there are groups in your community with thriving resident-led involvement! Consider forming partnerships with businesses, faith, or cultural groups.



Create a new vision with residents

Hubs are organic, resident-led, and do not rely on advantages we assume come with previously built assets. Invite residents to create a vision for a future hub, in a space they choose.

TIP: hubs often grow naturally in “bumping places,” like dog parks, rinks, or community gardens.

The Hard Work: Embrace Change



Compare your work with changing community needs

Calgary’s growth is huge, and communities are changing. This isn’t just about population growth, or increasing diversity. Associations need to address the historical way we do things, whether we’re willing to change, and how we can build relationships with naturally-diverse communities.



Self-reflect: does your board have leaders from different community groups?

Lots of boards form cultures or reputations, unknowingly, that might be different between what the public sees, and what the board feels as “insiders.” Just because a board is hard working, doesn’t mean residents get it. Consider what board-to-resident representation should look like.



Talk about risk, take chances

Risk management is never-ending, but it’s important to balance our priorities and not be so risk-adverse that we can’t take chances! Talk to your insurance provider, but be open to residents who come forward: find a way you can enable resident-led involvement, not hinder it.



**Community associations are well-positioned
to be hubs for community life.**



**We invite you to celebrate your work,
welcome and include all residents,
and be proud to tell your story.**



Visit calgarycommunities.com/hubs to learn
how you can “Grow Your Community Hub.”



Part two



I belong here

Check out the video at:

calgarycommunities.com/hubs

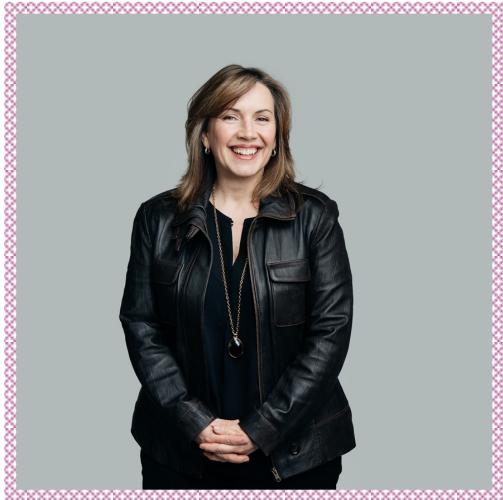




I belong here



Every day, Calgary community associations reach out to residents, asking people to get involved. It starts with a conversation, and hopefully leads to new relationships. But residents need more than being talked to, they need to *feel* welcomed. Try and create that positive feeling in every interaction, so residents feel more valued, and connected to you.



“I think it’s all about our people, that really bring that energy of ‘welcome’ to our communities. It’s the people who decide how we’re going to celebrate everyday life, it’s the people who decide how we’re going to keep our future happy, safe, healthy.”

- Wendy, Chinook Park/Kelvin Grove/Eagle Ridge

“I feel like myself here, I don’t have to pretend to be someone else because my community is so accepting. I don’t have to pretend to be some other kind of person, I am who I am and they accept me.”

- Astha, Edgemont Youth Press





Residents are more likely to continue building relationships if they feel welcomed, feel heard, and see their voices reflected in the work of the community association.

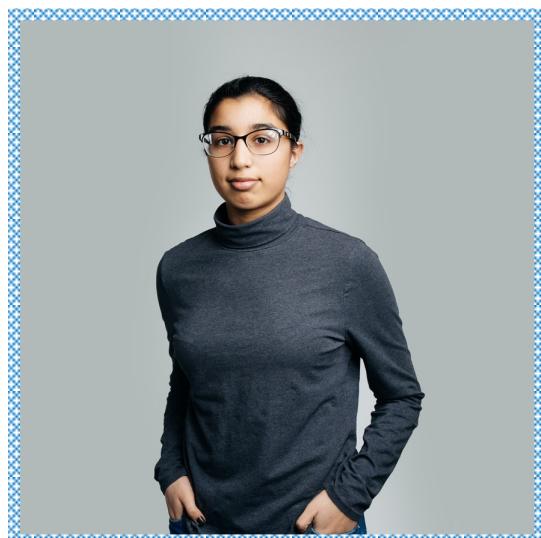
“A welcoming community for me is like a big family ... where you can feel comfortable sharing your ideas, your views if you want, where you can provide suggestions without any kind of intimidation, connect to people, and make your thoughts actionable.”



- Harpal, Falconridge/Castleridge

“A welcoming community to me means mutual respect and commitment, and I think volunteers do play a huge role in that.”

- Naureen, Falconridge/Castleridge



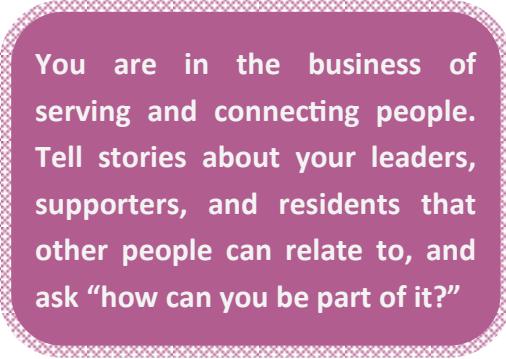


"A welcoming space is the centre of the community, it's a place people look at and say 'this belongs to me, it's in my community, I feel welcome there."

- Cec, Woodcreek



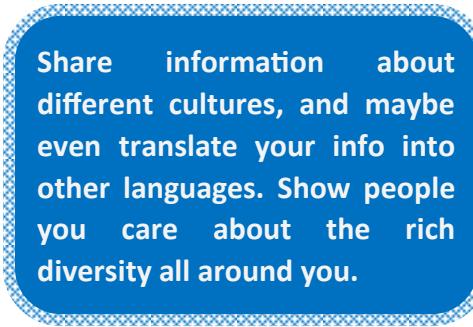
4 major ways you can help your space feel more welcoming and inclusive:



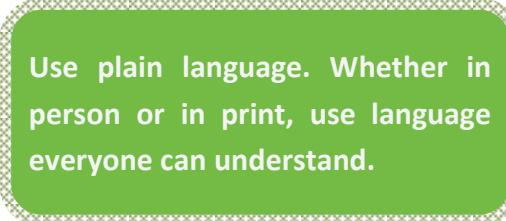
You are in the business of serving and connecting people. Tell stories about your leaders, supporters, and residents that other people can relate to, and ask "how can you be part of it?"



When you talk to people, be friendly in a purposeful way. It's easy to be a nice person, but it also takes effort to smile, greet someone, shake hands, and share kind words. Every impression counts.



Share information about different cultures, and maybe even translate your info into other languages. Show people you care about the rich diversity all around you.



Use plain language. Whether in person or in print, use language everyone can understand.



20 Great Ideas to be More Welcoming and Inclusive!



Celebrate Diversity



Feature diversity in your storytelling

Include more stories about the diversity of offerings, and opportunities. Help people see themselves in what is being offered, so they can identify with you in a more personal way.

TIP: don't just share work updates, share residents' testimonials, use fun and meaningful stories.



Showcase local cultures

Write newsletter articles, web posts, and host programs or events that showcase local cultures. This can be done in so many ways, from dancing and the arts, to multicultural food fairs!

TIP: food fairs are often extremely popular, and help strengthen a sense of multiculturalism.



Celebrate your heritage

What legacies can you celebrate in your community? Think about the different places, cultures, or specific groups and people who can help you share what makes your community special!

TIP: ask if you can celebrate local community heroes as well! It's great to show that investment.



Share unexpected stories

If residents know who your group is, there's a good chance they assume a lot about you. Try to find little stories that might surprise people, so they view you in colourful, unexpected ways.

Make it Personal



Say "thank you," in different ways

This sounds simple, but saying "thank you" requires intention. People are so busy, it takes time to pause, recognize someone, and do it thoughtfully. This always leads to stronger relationships!

TIP: recognition is good, but some people don't like the spotlight. Be respectful with recognition.



Share insights about your team, where they come from, why they're involved

Whether it's your board directors, volunteers, or staff, tell stories of why people are a part of it.

Help put a face on the organization that is more about people, not just programs and services.



20 Great Ideas to be More Welcoming and Inclusive!

- Celebrate personal gains**

Lots of community leaders talk about friendships they've made, or the way community has touched their family. Highlight these personal gains, and promote more than expected benefits.
- Turn “numbers” into “people”**

It's great to share big results (2,000 people came to our event!), but new residents are more likely to be moved by personal stories (this refugee family experienced their first Winterfest!)

TIP: try using photos and charts to turn your annual financial reports into visual stories about impact!
- Acknowledge “participants” as “contributors”**

Every bit counts, even for people who only attend a skating event with their family. Recognize participants as community builders, so people feel they're contributing in low-stakes ways.

Try Changing Your Tone

- Use plain language in written communications**

Regardless of how well people understand English or French, try and avoid business jargon, acronyms, or common expressions (“don’t poke the bear”). Communicate clearly, for everyone.

TIP: it’s helpful to write at an elementary reading level (when possible) so all people can follow.
- Don’t be so formal!**

We tend to use a lot of formal language: “The Organization Name” has provided these offerings, over the previous fiscal year. Try to mix it up, use friendlier pronouns like “We”, “Us” or ‘Ours’.
- Pick some principles you believe in, then share them publicly**

If you believe in principles like *respect, diversity, and inclusion*, then share these principles publicly, and often. Don’t be afraid to tell the community what you stand for, be transparent.

TIP: another way to do this is revisit Vision, Mission, Value statements, and align your principles.



20 Great Ideas to be More Welcoming and Inclusive!

Recognize Language Barriers

Translate your resources

By translating print resources into other languages for residents in the community, you can show people you recognize, value, and wish to engage with different cultural groups.

TIP: ethno cultural serving organizations might be able to help you find translation services!

Translate welcome messages for the community

Whether it's a public sign, bulletin board, or poster in a window, prominently display translated welcome messages so you visibly show people that they are recognized, invited, and welcomed.

Offer options on the word “volunteer”

Many new Canadians come from countries where the word “volunteer” can have negative references, including forced labour. Don’t assume everyone will hear this word and feel good.

TIP: people from all cultures still like to contribute, it’s just about shifting the way you ask!

Use a “People-First” Approach

Recognize that people self-start in different ways

Organizations have day-to-day needs they must address, and bottom lines. However, not all residents, members, volunteers, or staff self-start for the same reasons, or at the same pace. Be patient.

Give people meaningful roles and job names

Many people might be interested in a “Volunteer Recognition Director” role, but it’s a lot more exciting to be called the “Fun Captain.” Business doesn’t always have to be formal, try and spice it up!

Bring energy to public meetings

Try and make your “formal” meetings thoughtfully planned. Food, personal touches (volunteer awards), humour, and reasonable time limits are great ways to keep people engaged.

TIP: all our groups host Annual General Meetings – these are key opportunities to be engaging.



20 Great Ideas to be More Welcoming and Inclusive!



The Hard Work: Self-Evaluate Your Role in Relationships



Acknowledge that diversity means different things to different people

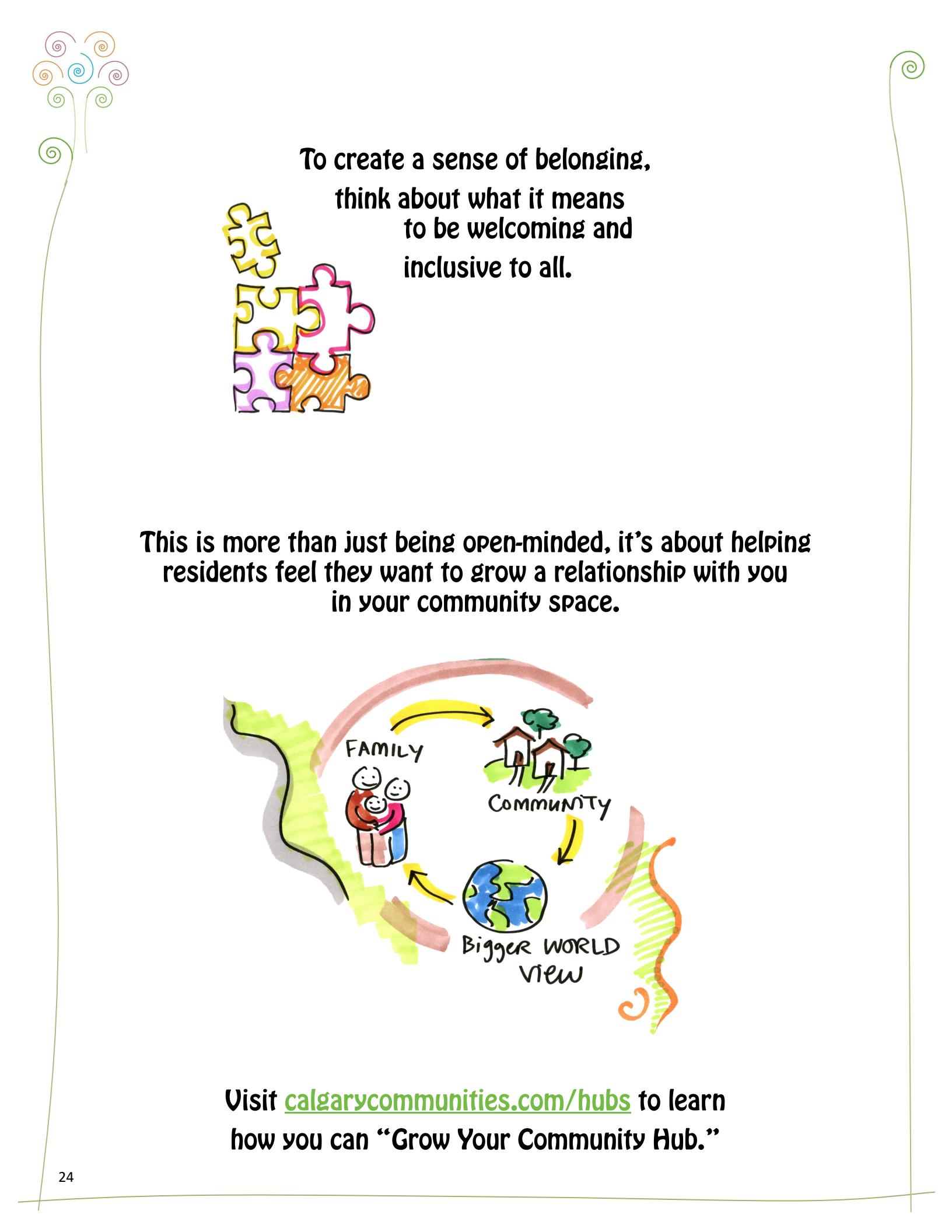
Diversity can be a challenging subject, it's hard to engage people we may not share experiences with. Talk about this as a group, think about "blind spots," and people you may be leaving out. Also, diversity discussions should never take place in a silo. Invite people from all backgrounds.



Bring a positive attitude

Frontline people make a huge difference in creating a space that feels welcoming and inclusive. Work as a team to think about what it means to greet and interact with people, in a friendly and inviting way. Body language, smiling, greeting: all these interactions require deliberate effort.

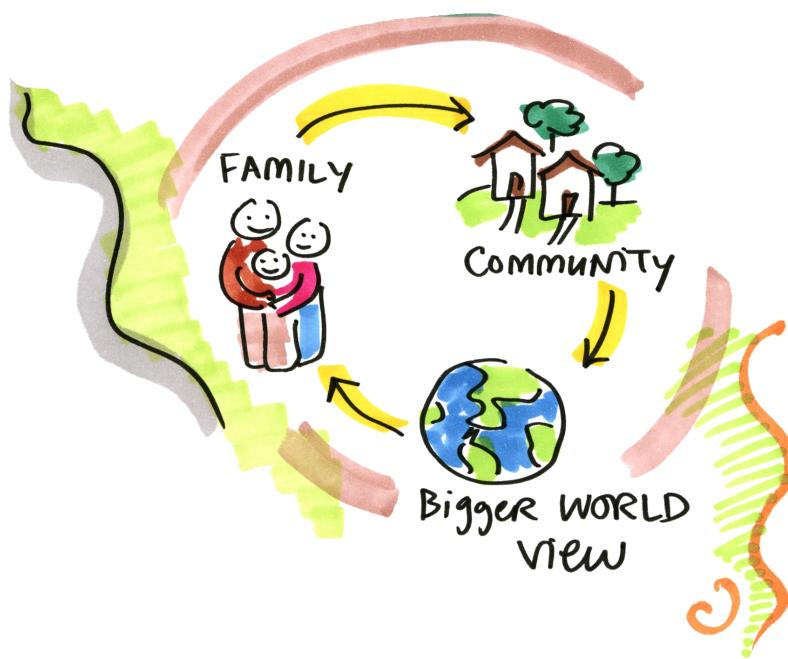




To create a sense of belonging,
think about what it means
to be welcoming and
inclusive to all.



This is more than just being open-minded, it's about helping residents feel they want to grow a relationship with you in your community space.



Visit calgarycommunities.com/hubs to learn how you can “Grow Your Community Hub.”

Part three

You have to start
somewhere

Check out the video at:

calgarycommunities.com/hubs



You have to start somewhere

To welcome residents to a community space, you have to be deliberate. It requires “intention” to help residents feel welcomed and included, and “small actions” can grow positive interactions into new relationships. The more people feel they belong, the more your hub will naturally grow.

“Welcoming is thinking of everybody that lives in your community, whether they’re from different cultures, different backgrounds, different ages ... think of how you can make those people feel like they’re part of that place they live in so that nobody gets left behind.”

- Faby, Somerset/Bridlewood



“I feel like my neighbours are always there for me ... just walking outside, people are always greeting me with a smile and it just feels so nice to be part of it.”

- Emily, Edgemont Youth Press



Communities are naturally diverse, but not all community associations are understood as spaces that are open and friendly. We have an opportunity in Calgary to reconnect with our history of grassroots volunteers, and help new people feel this passion. To help people feel connected to a potential hub, we need to approach people, listen to them, and consider what it means to do things differently.

"We try to talk to everyone who kind of shows a little bit of interest and we tell them what we're all about ... there are lots of people who didn't know they could come and then they do start coming and they love it ... it's a way for them to feel like they own the community, it's not somebody else's, it's their community."

- Nosh, Taradale



"We need to start embracing changes which will then welcome a greater diversity, which can then diversify the community and lead to relationship building and more compassion."

- Alicia, Brentwood



"The more we bring people together at a leadership level in a community who are different from one another, the more chances we have of letting people in our community know we're here."

- Ami, Rosemont



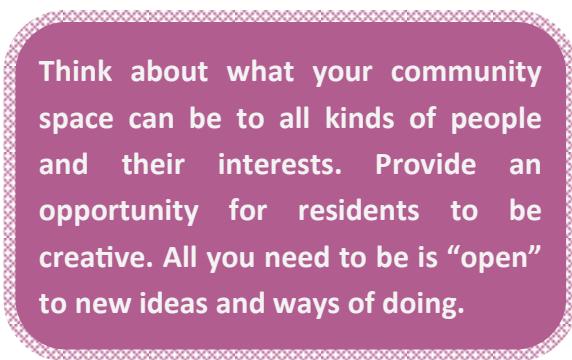


“A space needs to be open, where there’s no sense of ‘oh well, I’m not good enough to be there.’ Find someone you don’t know, the easiest thing to do is ask them their name and where they came from.”

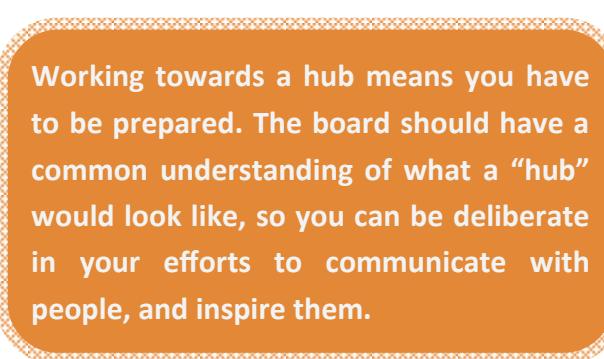
- Omar, Beltline



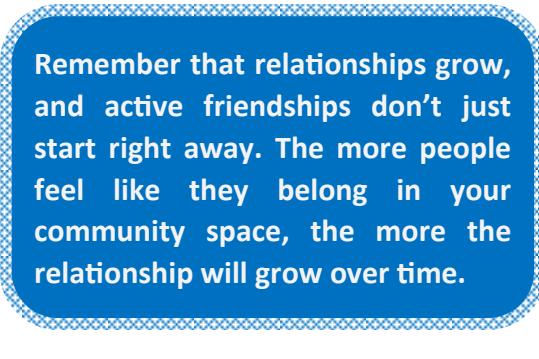
4 major ways you can engage people to grow your community hub:



Think about what your community space can be to all kinds of people and their interests. Provide an opportunity for residents to be creative. All you need to be is “open” to new ideas and ways of doing.



Working towards a hub means you have to be prepared. The board should have a common understanding of what a “hub” would look like, so you can be deliberate in your efforts to communicate with people, and inspire them.



Remember that relationships grow, and active friendships don’t just start right away. The more people feel like they belong in your community space, the more the relationship will grow over time.



Give lots of different ways for people to talk to you. Not everyone’s comfortable with newsletter ads, websites, or social media. The more ways you can keep the conversation going, the better.



20 Great Ideas to Get Started and Engage Residents!



Be Creative, Mix it Up!



Experiment with different communication tools, within your means

Share your story, and use many different communication tools. Newsletters, websites, social media, member databases, partners who promote you. The more exposure, the better!

TIP: be compelling with some unique “key messages” that you can share often, on all platforms.



Offer options for short, mid, or long-term involvement

Instead of always asking for traditional, volunteer-based help, offer a range of options. People often contribute by attending, participating, and sharing information, before they might consider buying membership or volunteering at your organization.



Bring different groups together for creative purposes

Lots of people enjoy being part of something that celebrates difference in some form of collective.

Think about how you can bring unexpected groups together, and celebrate diversity.

TIP: try intergenerational ideas (seniors and youth), or multicultural showcases (art, music, dance, etc.)

Reach Out to People



Greeters

Ask volunteers to welcome people at programs and events. Not all people are comfortable with being approached by a stranger, but “greeters” are pleasant roles who help set a positive tone.



Set easy goals to network

Ask volunteers and staff to come up with easy goals to engage with residents. Try not to miss opportunities, and give people low-stakes goals to achieve (talk to 3 people you’ve never met.)

TIP: flipping burgers at a Stampede Breakfast is great, but remember to network with residents!



Make your invitations friendly

Just because you’re inviting residents or members to a public meeting or event, doesn’t mean your invite has to sound formal. Encourage people to join you for a fun night out, or bring a friend!

TIP: try combining informal social activities with formal business, like a social mixer after an AGM.



20 Great Ideas to Get Started and Engage Residents!



Consider “low-cost” welcome messages for new residents

It can be expensive and time-consuming to build “welcome packages” for new residents, but think of other ways you can welcome people who’ve made this community their new home.

TIP: can you celebrate their story in your community newsletter, or offer free a membership?

Be Encouraging to Volunteers

Use a “Yes, and!” approach with people who come forward

While board roles can certainly be formal and fixed, try tailoring roles to people who would like to help out, based on their skill sets. They’re more likely to stick around if they enjoy their work!

TIP: saying “Yes, and!” is simply the positive way of accepting an idea, and building upon it.

Don’t just ask people for help, promote personal growth

Promote things that residents will gain from involvement, which aren’t just task-related: skill development, leadership, network building, a sense of belonging. Prioritize benefits over need.

Be prepared and positive when you’re “making the ask”

If you want to quit your director role at an Annual General Meeting, but you’re “willing to keep doing this stuff if no one else wants the thankless job” — that lack of enthusiasm will block people.

Offer structure so volunteers know what they’re getting into

Volunteers who come together to be part of something, help out, and give back are more likely to keep contributing if they feel set-up for success. Be clear and offer structure for involvement.

Rethink Barriers to Involvement

Be mindful of all barriers (not just physical ones)

There are common event barriers like time of day, accessibility, or offering on-site childcare, but other barriers like cultural food sensitivities or religious holidays may not be as obvious.

Get an outside opinion

Do you have a friend, family member, or acquaintance who’s not involved in your work, and can offer a neutral perspective? Try asking them to review your newsletter article, or visit your hall.



20 Great Ideas to Get Started and Engage Residents!



Help people feel comfortable

Whether you're gathering people in a building on a cold winter day, or hosting an event in a hot summer park, offer comforts: like a portable tent that provides shade in a park space.

Talk about accommodations

People often assume "what they see is what they get": a movie in the park is probably for little kids, or a skating party requires people bring their own skates. If you have other options, share!

Be as Clear and Obvious as Possible

Make information easy to find

Think about all the sources people have to go to in order to find information (a bulletin board, a website, a newsletter.) Make your information direct and easy to locate, no matter the medium!

Clearly advertise and present your activity plan

Try not to overload people with information, but what you DO share should be clear, to prevent confusion. "Come skate with us, anytime from 2-5pm" is more effective than "Skating at 2pm."

TIP: some people also like event times and schedules, in case they only want to visit for a portion.

The Hard Work: Take Small Steps, and Be Patient

Research your community demographics

Being welcoming and inclusive requires an effort to identify who lives in the community (City census), and how you engage diverse groups. Just because cultural groups don't engage you, doesn't mean they don't care, or wouldn't answer your call if you introduced yourself.

Form relationships with cultural leaders, ambassadors, and elders

Has your association met anyone who might be an elder in their cultural group? Consider reaching out to ethnic, social, and cultural groups who can help bridge community relationships.

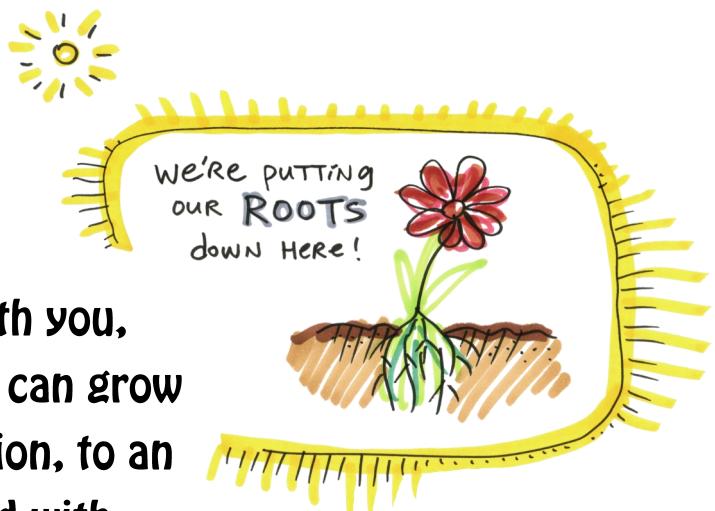
Focus on "small wins"

Remember that not all outputs (data) or outcomes (indicators of change) are obvious in what they achieve. A meaningful interaction is often more important than the size of a crowd.

TIP: hubs do not grow overnight, they are based on relationships — and relationships take time!



**Community spaces aren't naturally welcoming.
Residents go to places they feel comfortable
and connected with.**



**The more residents identify with you,
the more your space can grow
from being a busy location, to an
energized hub filled with
resident-led involvement.**

Visit calgarycommunities.com/hubs to learn
how you can “Grow Your Community Hub.”



**working with residents to
feel a sense of belonging
so nobody gets left behind**





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