

How to keep your community engaged

How to keep your community active and responsive over time

Overview

Sustaining engagement over the lifetime of a project can be tricky and there will be moments of amazing energy and momentum, and times where there are natural lulls in reporting.

From monetary incentives, to additional training and community building, there are many different tools and techniques you can use to encourage communities to keep talking. However, something that works with a group in one context may not work in another, so it is a good idea to use the co-design process to engage with your communities and understand what motivates them.

In many cases, it may be more appropriate to offer in-kind gifts like coaching or other external opportunities instead of payments. In fact, these should always be part of any project wherever possible. However, in this guide, we are going to talk specifically about using top-ups, micro-payments and grants as a way to incentivize engagement and redistribute some of the budget back to the community you are working with.

Top-up can be used in two different ways:

1. Firstly, no community reporter should be out-of-pocket to participate in the project – connectivity can be expensive and so giving credit to cover costs for those who need it is essential. It is important not to just think of the cost of sending in reports, but also the costs associated with attending online meetings or training that can use up a lot of data.
2. Outside of covering costs, additional top-up could be used as an incentive to encourage participation, providing small rewards for those who have been the most active that week.

Micro-payments and grants can also be used in a few different ways:

1. As above, micro-payments can be used to cover out-of-pocket expenses, for example if a reporter needs to travel to report on a story, or needs to buy lunch or dinner.
2. Vouchers to thank people for taking part.
3. Micro grants can be used as incentives, with reporters applying for small amounts of funding to develop new skills, cover time to work on a more

in-depth story, or kick-off a complementary creative co-production project. In the past we've funded grants to run events, hire recording studios and buy tickets to training seminars. Whatever your budget, it is a good idea to have a flexible pot available for this type of incentivisation, however big or small.

4. Subscriptions to digital software (e.g. Adobe Premiere Pro) or additional equipment (e.g. microphones or stabilizers for smartphone filming) to support reporting.

Whatever you decide, remuneration should always be meaningful. It is not appropriate to provide vouchers or incentives as a way of helping to reach a certain number or meet a quota of participants. This may result in participants who are engaging for the wrong reasons, and may lead to drop-off later down the line.

Tools you will need

- A smartphone and a computer
- A secure database of reporter's contact numbers and phone network information
- A Paypal account
- A payment method to use via Paypal

Step-by Step

Step 1

During the scoping phase of your project, work with members from the community you are planning to engage with to identify two things:

- Are there any barriers that would stop people from taking part, specifically in terms of practical resources (e.g. cost of phone data, cost of travelling)?
- What are the different motivating factors for the community to participate?

Step 2

If you decide that phone credit and/or micro-payments is something you are going to provide for reporters, then you need to understand how best to distribute those.

Paypal is a good option.

Step 3

You will also need a database of the reporter's phone numbers and service providers so that you can buy the right vouchers/codes.

If reporters are on a monthly plan, then there can be issues as they are already purchasing data. However, you could use other vouchers (e.g. using [Mobile Top Up UK](#) for Spotify, online gaming etc.) to reward and incentivise those who do not need phone credit.

Step 4

As important as the method you use to distribute the top-up / micropayments is a clear structure for how and when they will be given to participants.

- Will you be distributing on a weekly or monthly basis (we'd suggest monthly as it is less admin work)
- Are there any conditions attached?
- If you are using micro-grants, what is the application process? How often can reporters apply? What is the maximum amount they can apply for and what is the decision process (e.g. case-by-case or a monthly meeting where the grants are agreed on for that month)?

Step 5

Whatever incentives you do put in place, they need to be clearly defined and communicated with your reporter network from the outset.