



## UK Rural Community Empowerment The Role of Community Engagement

*“We believe  
‘how’ we are together  
informs, nourishes &  
inspires ‘what’ we  
can achieve”*

*Here at Culture Garden, we believe that a healthy group culture is the ground which gives rise to successful projects and thriving communities. A group's culture is formed in the subtle interplay of attitudes, expectations, and behaviours which interweave with its systems of communication, governance, and decision-making. When healthy, this interplay can be a group's life blood, nourishing, inspiring, and empowering its actions throughout its lifespan.*

### The Challenge

Rapidly shifting global economic, environmental and political spheres, along with Brexit and a weakened Pound are exacerbating the challenges faced by rural towns and villages across the UK. Banks and post offices are shutting down, long-standing local family businesses are disappearing from the high streets, youth and families are moving to bigger cities in search of employment and affordable housing. In response, rural Scottish residents, businesses, and policy makers are looking for ways to support their communities to become more locally self-reliant, while skilfully engaging their interdependence with surrounding areas.

A growing number of Scottish communities and municipal authorities are engaging community-led, asset or strength based community and economic development to encourage such local participation. Scottish Government's [Community Empowerment Act](#) strives to foster local engagement and building interconnections between individuals, enterprises and organisations.

The most successful initiatives are “Place-Based,” meaning that they engage communities within their local contexts, and understand the uniqueness of local conditions, collaborators, and resources. Place-Based initiatives engage community-defined common assets and opportunities, project scoping and locally relevant action plans, community participation to support progress whilst harvesting locally-specific lessons learned, and communicates those outcomes and showcases the local successes in order to encourage more citizen participation into the future.

The evidence thus far from Corra's [Getting Alongside Communities](#) demonstrates that to encourage long-term wellbeing, rural communities must create and foster synergistic local partnerships in order to effectively address their local social, environmental and economic needs in a more unified, co-ordinated way. However, promising local efforts – often carried out by volunteers – have a hard time engaging & sustaining local actors over the long-term, which reduces their scope and impact. And, there is limited funding to access the specialised skills in community engagement required to lay a long-standing foundation for local collaboration.

*People in Place is currently working alongside nine communities in Scotland, supporting local people to connect, collaborate on ideas, and take action to create positive change. The community is at the heart of everything we do. Each community we work with has a dedicated Community Co-ordinator, who will get alongside the community by listening, bringing people together for conversations, and to identify shared priorities. We focus on inclusive engagement. We help facilitate and enable capacity building within the community; widening community participation, seeking out voices that are seldom heard; and ultimately resulting in locally-led actions being taken.*

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## The Opportunity

Incorporating a paid Community Engagement role, locally based, responsible for networking and collaborating across local sectors (ie. voluntary groups, organisations & businesses) is a key, crucial support for community empowerment and long-term resilience. The goal of this 24–36 month role is to create Collaborative conditions and to map the opportunities for a community to initiate and tend to its own plans, actions, developments and projects that express local values and interests.

In supporting and maintaining collaborative relationships within the community and between its organisations, the Community Engagement role ensures the needs of local groups are effectively communicated and addressed in partnership with the intentions of the community. With experience and education in Community Development (networking, capacity building, organising and project management), the role will support collaborations, self-accountability and effectiveness, whilst encouraging the establishment of cultural anchors in the community to develop key cultural supports (such as peace-making and governance/decision making).

## The Outcomes

The Community Engagement role will be responsible for supporting accountable structures by working directly with the local administration, elected officials and/or the organisations as a liaison with the project(s) envisioned. Along with providing advice and support on a wide range of community issues while holding the big picture and its project management over time by:

- Carrying out community consultation and engagement;
- Mapping of community resources and assets to create a local resource map and identify gaps;
- Bringing together/supporting networks to engage their capacity & function as a local anchor organisation;
- Supporting the creation of community documents such as Neighbourhood Plans / Housing, Community Charters and Community Economic Development plans;
- Supporting Community groups to refine/synergise their roles & relationships to streamline collaboration;
- Researching and Scoping suggested community project opportunities;
- Identify funding opportunities to enable the delivery of identified projects and initiative, and offering recommendations on how they might best proceed;
- Promoting peacekeeping, governance, and other cultural practices to enhance the interpersonal foundations of local collaboration;
- Partnering with administrator to communicate progress via social media, website and/or newsletter that represents local voices and activities, whilst showcasing positive stories:
  - \* Collaborating to create local community monthly newsletters and Social Media updates to showcase recent activities / actions / celebrations;
  - \* Creating a central booking system and calendar of events at various community locations;
- Reporting quarterly on activities and Lessons Learned along with Recommendations to guide next steps to showcase achievements to inform and inspire resilient action.

## The Timeline

Community Engagement is an iterative process where trust and vulnerability are essential ingredients that are build over time. Results are usually able to be seen, documented and accessed within a 1, 2 and 3 year framework.

## The Funding & Support

Wage: £20/hour @ 22.5 hours/week = £24,000/year pro-rated, with essential supports:

- Central office
- Administrative support



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## About Culture Garden

This moment in history is compelling groups of all kinds to make a shift towards more collaborative ways of organising and acting, and to increase their effectiveness in a changing world. However, despite these groups' best intentions and often considerable skill, many find they are unable to achieve complete and lasting change.

At this time of increasing uncertainty and environmental crises, Culture Garden is opening up the territory of our group cultures, learning a new landscape and building the skills to **Connect**, **Create** and **Collaborate** in order to transform our cultures — and the world — from the inside out. We believe that, in order to truly meet the challenges of our changing world and to become more successful in our group initiatives, we must consciously un-learn Dominance-based patterning and integrate instead the skillset for “Partnership”.

**Partnership** is an emergent philosophy of leadership which understands that the best outcomes for any endeavour are the ones that benefit everyone involved. This is based in the synergetic alignment between the multitude of interdependent roles, requiring group cultures to understand how to include and engage their members' diverse perspectives, priorities, and strengths, in a robust and effective manner.

Culture Garden provides consulting, facilitation, and project management, as well as experiential educational programmes, to enable organisations and communities to make the transition towards partnership-oriented ways of being and doing together. We help our **Clients** to incorporate systems, structures, and practices to foster a thriving internal culture, which increases operational flexibility, and responsiveness, improving their collective impacts. They learn to achieve these results by distributing power and authority throughout the whole, in unity and alignment.

At the same time, we support the human experience of these transitions, while holding spaces to allow for the organisation's inner guidance, and any new opportunities, to emerge.

### James Wood — MA, CED

James is a Community & Organisational Development specialist with 20 years of international and multicultural experience with governments, charities, and community groups. He leads strength-based, holistic action planning processes to support common-ground solutions to local, regional, and global challenges. He holds an Interdisciplinary Master's Degree in *Sustainability and Public Policy* and a Bachelor's Degree in *Social Anthropology and Community Economic Development* (CED) from Simon Fraser University, Canada. James believes that collaboration and co-mentorship are powerful keys to creating healthy local & global cultures:

[www.JamesWood.ca](http://www.JamesWood.ca) & [www.CultureGarden.org](http://www.CultureGarden.org)



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Growing Healthy Group Cultures for a Better World