



Guide to Open Government  
chapter 2

# Active Citizenship

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Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme

chapter 2

# Active Citizenship



## Guide to Open Government chapter 2 - Active Citizenship

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# A Guide to Active Citizenship

## This guide is for the ordinary citizen. (Anton or “Joe Public”)

It is not just about Good and Best Practice.

It is a simple and practical approach aimed at helping the ordinary citizen engage in activities that will benefit themselves, their families, their communities and their wider societies.

Active Citizenship is the essential ingredient that makes Open Government a reality and enables Smart Cities to work best for the people who live in them.

Open Government needs Active Citizens and Open Data needs Active Citizens to understand the data.

Have you got what it takes to make a difference?

## Who or What is an active citizen?

Active citizens are people who care about their local communities and the places where they live. They want to make a positive difference or make something happen by having their say.



## Why become an active citizen?

Active citizens can help decide and influence a range of things, including how things are run and what gets done, what gets funded and what gets built.

Being an active citizen enables you to make a difference to your local community or to an individual person.

Different roles require different amounts of time and you can choose a role depending on the amount of time you have available.

A voter, good neighbour, community activist, community group member, responsible citizen and consulted citizen only need a small amount of time here and there, which you can build into your daily routine.

Citizen Advisers and Volunteers require more involvement and this will vary from a full time position to few hours a month. Nowadays, some employers are beginning to understand the benefits for their employees, and are prepared to give time off for such work. Also most expenses (such as travel) can be paid back to you by the organisation you serve.

Once you have decided to become an active citizen then there are some questions to be considered.

## What's in it for me?

As well as taking pride in making a difference you will also gain a range of benefits, such as developing and practicing your skills, improving your employability and meeting new people. Your activity will be seen in a positive light by the community. There will be opportunities to build positive relationships within the community. You will be able to make some the aspects of society which affect you.

## What is involved?

You can start small by helping out your neighbour or a local community group. Or you can advise your local public bodies (such as the NHS, police or council) by taking part in consultations and questionnaires, attending neighbourhood meetings or simply posting a question or thought on Twitter.

You can put pressure on the council or Government by taking part in direct action. Petitions are a way to voice your concern and gather support.

You can assist or provide advice to a public service or charity, or become a citizen governor and take part in decision-making that affects your local school, court or council.

# What kind of things can you get involved in?

We have grouped roles into eight sections, with examples and suggestions. It's now up to you, just how much you do. Do something, become an active and effective citizen.

## Voter

- This is probably the simplest and most powerful tool in the Active Citizen's hands.

### What can I do?

- Vote at local, national and European levels to help choose the people who represent you.
- Take a friend to the polling booth.
- Phone a friend to remind them to vote.
- Contact your local Council to make sure that you are on the register of electors.
- Register for a postal vote if you are going to be away on polling day or if you have mobility issues.
- Sign petitions about issues that concern you, both paper based and online via E-petitions.
- Go to ward surgeries and meet with your local political representative about key issues.
- Inform yourself by reading about local issues.
- Join a political party.

## Community Group Member

- take part in activities with like-minded people.

### What can I do?

- Activities can range from dancing, wall climbing, book clubs, lace making, growing food, Paint a mural over graffiti.
- Join a hillwalking, jogging or any other sporting organisation.

**What skills will I need?** That's the benefit of doing these activities - you will learn new skills, meet new people and find new friends.

**How do I make contact?** Find out through Local press adverts, notice boards, local college or adult education centres, what's on at community centres and the internet. Ask your neighbours.

## Good neighbour

- help people who live in your street to be more active and less dependent on public services.

### How do I make contact?

- If you do not already know them then go and introduce yourself, be brave and knock on their door

### What can I do?

- Keep a watch on your neighbour's home while they are away,
- Help an elderly person by delivering shopping and give them information about a local service,
- Look after a neighbour's pet while they are on holiday.
- Shop at a local, family owned business,
- Organize a carpooling campaign in your area,
- Join the neighbourhood watch.
- Start a book club in your area.

### What skills will I need?

- Self-confidence and mobility.

## Responsible Citizen

- take action to protect your environment

### What can I do?

- Start recycling your waste.
- Clean up rubbish along a river, beach or park.
- Participate in local festivals and events.
- Don't litter.
- Give blood.
- Donate unwanted clothing/toys to a local charity shop.
- Donate unwanted books to a local library.
- Donate your old computer to a school.
- Join your local library and attend open evenings.
- Support local charity events and drives.

### How do I make contact or find out what to do?

- Internet

## Consulted Citizen

- give feedback to public bodies about their services.

### What can I do?

- This can range from questionnaires to neighbourhood meetings.
- How do I make contact?
- Internet search,
- notice boards at civic buildings,
- hospitals and other service providers.
- Always respond to surveys, give your feedback

### What skills will I need?

- Literacy and Numeracy,
- self confidence,

## Volunteer

give up some spare time to work with a local charity or service.

### What could I do?

- Donate some time to help a local organisation, do some office work,
- share skills by coaching a sports team,
- run a cookery club,
- assist a mental health support group.
- Plant a tree. Deliver meals to homebound individuals.
- Plant flowers in public areas that could use some colour. Mentor a young person.
- Coach a children's sports team.
- Volunteer at a local St. John Ambulance or Red Cross.
- Meals on Wheels.
- Visit senior citizens at a nursing home.
- Help out at a homeless shelter.
- Fundraise for charity.
- Volunteer on a helpline.
- Teach at an adult literacy center.
- Volunteer at local sports club.
- Participate in a marathon for your favorite charity.
- Reading to old people in hospital.
- Sign up to Volunteer,
- Walk dogs for a local animal shelter.

### How do I make contact?

- Internet,
- Information from local Council,
- Local Voluntary Services,
- Citizens' Advice Bureau.
- What skills will I need?
- Interpersonal and Social skills,
- Literacy and Numeracy,
- IT Skills,
- appropriate background and experience.

# Advice about Achieving Your Potential as an Active Citizen.

There are Four essential ingredients for people to be confident and effective in the public domain.

## Community activist

- take action to change a local situation.

### What could I do?

- Activist activities can include campaigning,
- establish a network or group,
- write to your MP,
- set up or signing a petition,
- Join a National or International organisation,
- Join the residents committee of your locality.
- start up information stalls or use the media to further an issue.
- Organise a comedy night for charity.
- Organise an event to raise awareness of a problem in your area.
- Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about an issue you care about.
- Organize a public issues forum for your community.
- Raise awareness of political issues in your community.
- Organise a local debate on any issue.

### How do I make contact?

### What skills will I need?

- Self confidence,
- literacy and numeracy.

## Citizen Adviser

- advise and help make decisions about local services.

### What could I do?

Become a charity trustee, magistrate, councilor, member of a tenant panel, school governor.  
Liaise with a local university or school to improve community relations.  
Liaise with local hospital, health centre or medical practice to give patient feedback.

### What skills will I need?

Self-confidence, thoughtful and articulate, interpersonal skills.

### How do I make contact?

## 1 Value your own skills.

Here the focus is on you as an individual, whether in terms of confidence building, validating life experiences or practical skills development, for example, presentation skills, public speaking, chairing meetings, budgeting, planning, dealing with difficult situations, being more assertive. In general, these can be the building blocks towards increased self-esteem and an acceptance of one's own value and experiences.

## 2 Know yourself

At this stage reflect upon our own situation in relation to the wider context of life's experiences. It provides the opportunity to make sense of the factors that shape our lives, for example, education, religion, family, motherhood, sexuality, class, race, economic dependence. It is at this point that we realise that while we have many experiences in common, we are all products of our particular and diverse cultures, backgrounds and traditions. If we can learn how to value ourselves and communicate with others in a genuine way, we are in a better position to develop a network of support and deal with the inevitable conflicts and work together to make positive changes.

## 3 Know how the external world operates

To be able to make changes and get our voices heard we need to know how the system operates: how decision-making structures are set up, how these structures work, who is involved, how accountable they are, who holds power in any given situation. This means knowing about the local, national and international structures that impact upon our lives. If we are clear about our place within the system; as a voter, a constituent, a consumer, a citizen, we start to have a clearer understanding about our rights and responsibilities. Once we have this knowledge we can make choices about where we want to be and the roles we want to play, for example, an elected member, a school governor, an MP, a magistrate, on a Citizen's Panel.

## 4 Know where to go to get what you need

In order to make changes we have to make our voice heard, ask people for information and know how to get what we want from individuals and organisations. This can involve negotiating, campaigning, lobbying, researching issues, listing pros and cons, planning what you are going to say and how to say it - or simply being more assertive!

# Good and Best Practice examples from the partnership and across Europe and the World.

Citizenship education is now compulsory in UK schools up to 14 and is often available as an option beyond that age. In Scotland, UK, active citizenship has been one of the three major themes of community policy since The Osler Report (section 6.6) in 1998.

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Active Citizenship

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JCI Ireland – Active Citizen week

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Stevenage Council, UK

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Council of Europe, Education for Democratic Citizenship

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information about a comprehensive education programme developed in the

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Volunteerism:

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UK for Active Citizenship.  
Good practice guides about active citizenship for organisations working with young people.

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Citizen Engagement

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Become a social entrepreneur.

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Citizen Engagement and contribution to Government

# We can identify some key characteristics of Active Citizenship:

- Participation in the community (involvement in a voluntary activity or engaging with local government agencies)
- People are empowered to play a part in the decisions and processes that affect them, particularly public policy and services
- Knowledge and understanding of the political/social/economic context of their participation so that they can make informed decisions
- Able to challenge policies or actions and existing structures on the basis of principles such as equality, inclusiveness, diversity and social justice.

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In Scotland, UK, active citizenship has been one of the three major themes of community policy since The Osler Report (section 6.6) in 1998.

Citizen Engagement can be seen as that aspect of Active Citizenship that is influenced mostly by Politicians, Government Officials and Civil servants and is a measure of the success of the Open Government Partnership.

## **citizenship and citizenship education:**

- the 'personally responsible citizen',
- the 'participatory citizen',
- the 'justice-orientated citizen'



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