



Although every community has different needs, these six tips are a great way to get started with engaging your community members and/or stakeholders about your trail project. These ideas will help you promote your vision and work through its role in your community, gathering support and ideas along the way.

1. Know Your Audiences:

Think through who the trails will benefit, as well as those who may perceive them negatively. Through this process you will clearly understand your audiences. Beneficiaries can include:

- The overall community of trail users: mountain bikers, hikers, trail runners, equestrians, etc
- Youth (and youth serving programs), both within the greater community as well as in immediate neighborhoods and schools near the trail project
- Local businesses — restaurants, shops, hotels, etc.
- Economic development organizations, community foundations, Chambers of Commerce
- Those who live near the project, even if they're not currently trail users
- Possible opponents may include:
 - Immediate neighbors to the project area who don't want more visitors
 - Wildlife/conservation groups may object to new trails in undeveloped areas
 - Those who have projects in direct competition for the same community dollars and/or access
 - Entities seeking other uses of the land, such as those in real estate development, farming or extraction.

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2. Refine Your Vision:

Settle on the primary goals and outcomes that will truly resonate with your community, and weave these into a clear vision for the project. Possibilities might include:

- Easily accessible recreation opportunities (equity)
- Physical and mental health
- Economic impact
- Attracting new residents (quality of life)
- Youth involvement (getting kids outside)
- Community improvement
- Preserving land from development
- Increase in nearby property values
- Displacement of negative use in parks

We can provide [resources and data](#) around many of these topics, which you can use to develop your talking points. These can be worked into presentations, websites and proposals, used in meetings, email outreach, etc.

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3. Communicate Your Vision:

Craft messaging that conveys these points in a genuine, open-ended way.

You will likely need to make different communication pieces for your different audiences — one for trail users, one for the local neighborhood, etc. Make clear that the public will have a say in what happens, so they should stay engaged. Design your communications to get people excited about the possibilities! If you have a map or concept plan document of the trails, use those to help people see your vision.

Also, educate and empower trail user/youth/community groups to communicate the broad community benefits of the trails in addition to their specific points of view.

The possibilities for communication are varied and only limited by your creativity:

- Email
- Key websites (trail group, land manager, etc)
- A website [specific to the project](#)
- Social media
- Flyers for nearby neighborhoods

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4. Gather Feedback:

Engage your audiences to learn how they feel about your vision. As you do this, the vision for the project will naturally adapt and change as you incorporate new ideas. Possibilities for feedback include (and you are likely to use them all):

- Email surveys (begin developing an email address list to work from)
- Public meetings. These should be as interactive and interesting as possible to encourage people to attend. Use maps, sticky notes, vision boards and anything else that will get people thinking and talking to each other. Pay special attention to feedback from neighborhoods surrounding the project area.
- Direct meetings with community groups and neighborhood associations. You can educate each other, and then they can help you collect feedback.
- Site visits. These can be focused on smaller groups to discuss their specific goals, or bring together several groups with the purpose of uniting people around the vision.

Don't skimp on these steps, since not soliciting feedback early in the process often creates headaches down the road as you run into issues and opponents. Solving for these from the beginning will get you to the finish line with fewer roadblocks.

Remember that opponents can become friends once you take time to understand their needs and wants. But even if that doesn't happen, opponents need to be heard and given their chance to speak; don't try to avoid or exclude them. Check out ideas for [Working with Opponents](#).

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5. Synthesize the Community's Desires:

Iteration is a valuable part of any goal, since this is where many great ideas grow into reality.

- Incorporate the feedback into your project and communicate around the changes as needed. As you do this, your list of supporters will often grow and the list of opponents will shrink as the vision begins to align with the community's wants and needs.
- Keep in mind that some new opponents may arise as you move through the project. For example, as you embark on trail design, individual homeowners may object to trail alignments that are within sight of their homes. Engage in open and direct conversations with these folks to hear their concerns, provide information, and seek resolution.
- Provide frequent project updates to keep everyone interested and engaged. Even small steps forward can be a good reason to make a social media post or update a website.

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6. Celebrate & Give Thanks.

As the project nears completion, unify the community in celebration.

- Talk up the accomplishment and specifically thank all parties involved. Any significant donors should receive heartfelt thanks and evidence of the impact of their contribution. Celebrate with a grand opening event.
- Keep everyone involved moving forward (through a website, Facebook page, etc), so the trail system or bike park becomes — and remains — a valued community asset.
- If you haven't already, think about programming: Encourage trail stewardship through volunteer days; seek out groups who can hold events and cultivate new riders; ask a neighborhood association to organize a hiking group, etc. Keep in mind that the success of this project can pave the way for future efforts.

A special note about projects in underserved areas: Bringing nature and recreation to those who haven't had access is an excellent goal. But it is critical these projects are done in full partnership with the communities involved to reflect their true desires and vision while avoiding any unintended outcomes. The [ideas presented here](#) offer a good education and starting point for engagement. This [planning guide](#) can also be helpful.

If you encounter significant roadblocks in your community engagement work, feel free to reach out for more specific help.

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