

How To Set Up a Town Team

Communities where all citizens can act on their desire to create, build, to organise, experiment and create are healthy, resilient and constructive ones. People need to be able to shape the communities that they live in by what they do and not just by what they spend.

Marcus Westbury, founder of Renew Newcastle and author of Creating Cities

Town teams are positive and proactive organisations that include businesses, landowners and residents working collaboratively with their local government to improve a place or area, often a town centre or 'main street'. Town teams:

- Provide vision and leadership for their place
- Are positive and proactive
- Are non-political in their approach
- Get stuck in and have a go rather than waiting for "someone else" to do "something"
- Independent from governments
- Run by the community for the community

Each team has different priorities and focuses, but all share this common approach, which is outlined in the Town Team Charter.

Town teams are catalysts for change in their local area. The town team model breaks down the barriers that often divide businesses, residents and local governments, and helps everyone to better understand the challenges and the opportunities to improve places. Every action is important!

We established Town Team Movement to help you start a successful town team. You'll be joining hundreds of other people in this growing movement for positive change.

Here are some ideas to get you started on your own town team journey.

I always thought **someone** should do **something**



1. Jeez, where do we start?

So, you may have had a few conversations with locals, maybe a few drinks and you want to find out more. Excellent! You have just completed Step 1!

Successful town teams generally have some common ingredients.

2. Find some leaders

Nothing's likely to happen without a few leaders to provide direction.

The good news is you don't have to be a leader to be a leader of leaders. Errr ... what we mean is that you may not see yourself as a leader. But others might. You can become a leader often by just being interested and showing up.

Look for the existing leaders in your community and tell them about what you are thinking about. They might also be interested and provide suggestions. Or they could get involved and help you.

3. Where?

What's your patch? Where's your turf? You need to roughly work out the area you will be working to improve. Is it a suburb, a town centre, a street, a neighbourhood? Defining the area you're interested in focuses your efforts and makes it easier to talk to other people about what you'll be doing.

4. What's the story? What's the vision?

Every place has a "story", which is usually hidden beneath the surface.

And that's good, because stories are important and powerful. People listen. Try and nail your place's story in three or four sentences.

Then aim for a positive vision for the future. What do you want it to become? You need to get people on board to help make the vision a reality.

Spend time on a compelling, positive vision and you'll bring lots of people with you!

There probably isn't a vision for your place (though do check with your local government though to make sure) yet. If there's nothing formal to build on, working with businesses and residents on a vision for the future of your place is probably the best thing you can do.

How do you capture suggestions for your vision, you ask? You could throw a street party or some other event. Walk around asking for people's ideas or set up a suggestions booth. Or you could run an online survey with Survey Monkey. Online surveys are easy and free ways to find out what people would like to see happen.

The more you put into your vision, the more you'll get out of it!

5. Focus on what you can do, not on what you can't do

There's a whole heap of stuff you shouldn't trouble yourselves with. No, really! Town teams won't be building new railway lines anytime soon, for example, no matter how good they'd be for a given area! Take on the wrong project and you'll burn out faster than one of those ghastly birthday sparklers you see at kids' parties.

We've learned the hard way just to focus on the things you can do. Use the matrix in our How to Prioritise Actions guide to make a list of the "easier to do" actions. They can be "higher impact" or "lower impact". Then forget about the other actions for now.

With this list of "easier to do" actions, you're now well placed to get some quick wins under your belt. Quick wins are the secret sauce of victorious town teams. They build trust and confidence within your team. They show traders, locals and even politicians that you're an organisation who "gets after it." Rack up as many as you can!

It's perfectly fine to start with some "easier to do, lower impact" actions when you're at this stage.

6. Create an Action Plan

An action plan is like a 'shopping list' of actions plus some reasons why the actions are needed. You don't have to limit the list to actions that are just for you. Some of them might be more appropriate for a local government, or residents, or businesses, or other community groups. (Though, of course, if you're listing actions for others, you'll need to talk to them and see what they think. That's part of the fun.)

Town teams have successfully created action plans and are working through them to try and 'tick off' the actions when they are finished. We can suggest some examples if you are interested in finding out more.

Creating an action plan for your place can:

- Set your vision for the place (what do you want to see happen in the future? What kind of place will it be?)
- Action plans get people talking constructively. With something concrete in front of them, people usually stop complaining and start engaging with you. Residents and traders can talk about priorities, or figure out ways they can help. They can share concerns or make suggestions. Whatever they'll be doing, it'll probably be a lot better than what they'd do if you didn't have an action plan!
- Action plans help you talk with your local government. Trust us, these guys respond to things like lists. They may seem a bit negative at first, with suggestions like "we'll need to see a formal application for that event," or "make sure the traders have completed the alfresco dining paperwork" but often that's their way of getting you over the line.
- Action plans help you to promote your team and your place all round. Conversations around action plans are perfect opportunities for sharing your vision!

7. Build connections with other community groups, businesses, residents and your local government

Find out about the other groups in your community. Who are they? What are their goals? Do you have things in common?

Dealing with local governments can be challenging. But you are probably going to need to speak or deal with them at some point. Let them know about your ideas. Do they have grants available? Do they know about placemaking? Do they have economic development officers?

You can generate lots of goodwill and save plenty of time when you build those connections!

8. Just start on something

Like we've said, quick wins are the magic formula. There isn't heaps to it. Just get cracking!

It's better to just have a go. Start small if that's easier. But just start. Have a social BBQ, or a street party, or a social event, or a working bee. You might be surprised with who turns up ...

Good luck! Town Team Movement is here to help.