Community Activism
The BA Guide to Engaging and Influencing Your Local Community
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Introduction

Bookshops operate in communities across the United Kingdom and are there to serve every member of society, every day. Booksellers are highly valued by their communities and have a beneficial impact on the locations where they trade.

But to maintain their valued status, booksellers must be ready to take action:

• to protect and promote the local economy through the high street
• to protect and develop social cohesion and a sense of community.

There is a strong business case for developing links and influence in your community, ensuring an active and culturally engaged locality where bookshops can thrive. Becoming a ‘High Street Hero’ is increasingly important in protecting both your trade and your locality.

To widen your engagement, there is a broad range of local stakeholders to consider. There are several strands:

1. Key local stakeholders: formal bodies and enterprise organisations such as your local council, the police and different types of business development hub
2. National campaigns
3. Local media
4. In your community - community-run groups, charities and organisations, other local businesses and networks, schools, and your customers.

This guide

This guide can help booksellers understand local decision making, identify the most important people to engage with locally, and draw on the experience of other booksellers in improving their local influence and contributing to the life of their communities.

WHY – your contribution as booksellers, and why stakeholders should engage with you

WHO – which groups/local stakeholders could you engage with to make a difference?

HOW – more details about these organisations and how to engage with them

WHAT – what did other booksellers do to build their community engagement?

Start at the shop door!

Build relationships with the people, groups and institutions most local to you and your business – they are likely to make the biggest difference. For example, your ward councillor may be more influential on local decisions than your member of parliament/assembly member; your police community support officer may have more impact on your business than the police and crime commissioner. Create the foundation of good relationships around your business and build from there.
Bookselling is important – so tell people.

It is important to get across to local stakeholders how much bookshops contribute to their communities, economically and in providing community hubs.

With turnover to the value of £1,325 million (Financial Year 2015/16), bookselling contributed up to £600 million to UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As creators of beneficial jobs, employing 24,400 people directly, wages and salaries paid by booksellers amount to between £415 million and £450 million. This results in an estimated tax contribution to the UK Exchequer of £131 million.*

The wider economic benefits are also impressive. For every £1 of bookselling sector turnover, a further £1.91 of turnover is supported elsewhere in the wider economy. This produces a total turnover of £3.8 billion, at least £1.9 billion in contributions to GDP, supporting a total of 46,000 jobs in publishing and the book supply chain, with employee remuneration reaching between £1.2 and £1.3 billion.

This strong economic contribution is matched by an important creative and cultural impact on UK communities and the economy that goes beyond merely money. UK bookshops promote authors, provide careers, support literacy, are cultural hubs and boost the vitality of the high street. These spill-over benefits set bookshops apart, highlighting not only their importance in the high street, but demonstrating their worth in comparison with multi-national online retailers such as Amazon, where pure profit is king.

* These statistics are taken directly from a report commissioned by the BA from the Centre for Economics and Business Research, Bookselling Britain: The economic contribution to – and impacts on – the economy of the UK’s bookselling sector (2017). If you would like physical copies of the report please ask the BA. Ask us, too, if you would like to order infographics like the one shown above.
The benefits booksellers bring: Your bookshop

National facts and figures are always important, but the best ambassador for bookselling locally is you and your bookshop.

What information can you share with your community about the contribution that you make to the local area? However small your bookshop is, you have an impact on the economy, so make that clear.

Do not assume that local people, even those in elected positions, are aware of the facts, such as how many people you employ, how much you pay in business rates, how much you have invested to make your shop more attractive, and how much you support community activity. Presenting these figures to the right people can make a real difference to how your business is perceived locally.

Fill in the My Bookshop’s Contribution sheet at the end of this guide on page 28 with details about your business, in order to make the case for your bookshop locally. This information can help you reflect on the work you do and understand where you could expand your community support.

What do you want to change?

Decide what it is you want to change or influence in your community. Whatever your message, have local and national facts and figures about bookselling to hand. Research what’s happening in your community so that you can argue your case for change. Talk to other local businesses, attend or read minutes of council meetings or the chamber of commerce, talk to business development hubs – wherever you can find reputable sources of information.

You may want to focus on general high street regeneration or particular issues such as promoting reading and literacy locally, improving diversity and inclusion, or reducing waste and environmental damage as a community. There may be local causes around which your action might coalesce, such as car parking, by-passes, empty high-street premises or the potential arrival of big chain stores.

Becoming a 'High Street Hero' is increasingly important in protecting both your trade and your locality.
1. Key local stakeholders

Consider engaging with some of these local partners to influence what happens in your area. This isn’t an exhaustive list – there may be other important players in your district.

There are a variety of political and administrative structures that organise or influence what happens in communities across the UK, from the UK Parliament in London and devolved governing bodies the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly, through county, district and borough councils, parish councils, to police and crime commissioners and metro mayors.

You can lobby their offices to ensure your concerns are understood and considered as part of their agenda.

Who do you already know? Where could you develop existing relationships to become more useful? Talk to other local business and contacts – who have they found helpful?

Then identify people you don’t know, but who might be a good starting point.

- Local Council
- County Council
- Combined Authority
- Elected Mayor
- Business Improvement District
- Town Team
- Local Enterprise Partnership and Growth Hubs
- Police
- Political representatives: MP, MSP, AM or MLA
- Local media.

At the back of this guide on page 29, you will find a Key Stakeholder Checklist where you can enter the names and contact details for as many of the categories of organisation with whom you think it will be useful to build engagement.

Local and county councils

Local and county councils (also known as local authorities) are the centre of power in communities. Engaging with the council can be key to aligning your business with their priorities or understanding how your business could adapt to local needs.

Local councils are responsible for making key decisions that affect your business, such as trading standards priorities, planning policy, business rates collection and economic growth. Councils must be transparent about the decisions they make and publish all the details of their meetings on their websites, usually under the ‘Your Council’ section of their websites.

Most parts of England have two systems of local authorities made up of district/borough/city councils and the county council. Other parts of England have one unitary authority, such as London boroughs and metropolitan boroughs.

In Scotland, there are 32 local authorities, with no second tier of county councils.

Wales has 22 unitary or county/county borough councils, responsible for providing services such as education, social services and town and country planning. They are not divided into local authorities as English county councils are, but work in partnership with local level town/community councils.

Northern Ireland has 11 borough/district/city councils.

Engaging with the council can be key to understanding how your business could adapt to local needs.
How to get involved

Most council areas are divided into local wards. Your ward councillor will vote on issues in main council and in sub committees that could affect your business. They are key people to make aware of the economic and social contribution of your bookshop and to lobby for change in your locale.

You can find out about your local council wherever you are in the UK by using the government website, www.gov.uk/find-local-council. You can find out who your local councillors around the UK via the website Writetothem.com.

Elected mayors, combined authorities and devolution deals

If your area has an elected mayor, they may be involved in projects of town/rural and high street regeneration and therefore become a useful contact. It is also helpful to be aware when your local area comes under a Devolution Deal or Combined Authority, so that you can find out what local priorities are for business development and town centre regeneration.

Various councils in England are led by directly elected mayors, who have responsibility for all local services. There are also ‘Metro Mayor’ positions in large cities. These mayors are very different from the civic mayor or chairman of the council who carry out ceremonial duties and chair meetings but can’t make decisions about council business. The number of elected mayors is expected to increase in the future. There are currently no elected mayors in Wales (although there is the option for councils to choose to do so here), Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Some local authorities have joined together to form Combined Authorities. These bigger areas may take on statutory functions transferred to them by the Secretary of State, plus any functions that the constituent authorities agree to share. Many of these Combined Authorities have an elected mayor at their head.

The Government has put in place Devolution Deals in England which devolve further powers from central government to local authorities to run services, such as business support services, and including new powers on public health, transport, licensing and more. The majority of Devolution Deals specified the creation of an elected mayor to oversee these powers. There are currently (2019) 10 devolution deals in place: North East, Tees Valley, Sheffield City Region, Greater Lincolnshire, East Anglia, Cornwall, West of England, West Midlands, Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester.

How to get involved

You can find the latest details on Devolution Deals and directly elected mayors here: www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution

Local business development organisations

There has been a strong drive from recent governments to empower local councils and create new local and regional institutions to develop business and economic growth.

New laws, such as the Localism Act 2016 and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, have created new local business development institutions. These now include Local Enterprise Partnerships, Business Improvement Districts and more informal partnerships such as Town Teams.

- Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

BIDs are business-led partnerships focused on improving and enhancing commercial areas including town and city centres, commercial locations and industrial estates. There are now over 200 BIDs in operation around the UK,
mainly in town and city centres. BIDs are created largely to enhance local business areas so that footfall and trade are increased.

BIDs are funded by a business rate levy of 1% for the businesses in an area. A BID can only be formed after a ballot of local businesses’ votes in favour of their formation. Note that if you are a very small business, some BIDs include provision for discounts or exemptions from the levy – for example, for properties below a certain rateable value.

1. Key local stakeholders...continued

**How to get involved**

BIDs want to engage with all businesses in their area to understand business’ needs and views on the local strategy. Is there a BID in your area which you could join, or could you work with other local businesses to establish such a group?

British BIDs is the leading organisation for BID members, providing advice, training, products and services. There is information on the British BIDs website ([www.britishbids.info](http://www.britishbids.info)) on where to find your nearest BID or how to set up your own BID.

- **Town Teams**

Town Teams are informal town centre partnerships set up as a result of the Government’s Portas Review on the future of our high streets. They are partnerships of residents, local businesses and community representatives which aim to promote town centres and enhance shopping areas for local consumers.

There are over 330 town teams operating across the UK, many of which have received central government funding to support their activity. These partners hold regular meetings with local businesses which trade on high streets and local parades.

**How to get involved**

You can find the latest work by Town Teams on the Association of Town and City Management website, [www.atcm.org](http://www.atcm.org)

- **Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Growth Hubs**

LEPs are voluntary partnership between local authorities and businesses to determine local economic priorities for investment in infrastructure and job growth. The partnerships were established to bring together business and civic leaders across an economic area to direct investment where it will most effectively drive growth and to bring a strong business voice to local decision-making, driving sustainable, private sector-led growth.

There are 38 LEPs in operation in England. Only some of these have retail representatives on their boards, and they want to engage with smaller local businesses.

As part of their remit, LEPs lead Growth Hubs, which are local public/private sector partnerships bringing together public and private sector partners to promote, co-ordinate and deliver business support. They integrate national and local business support so that it’s easy for businesses to access resources, and they provide support for small businesses to start-up, scale-up and thrive.

**How to get involved**

[www.lepnetwork.net](http://www.lepnetwork.net) has information about the partnerships and where to find your nearest LEP.
The role of PCCs is to be the voice of the community and to hold the police to account.

In Scotland, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice holds these responsibilities; in Northern Ireland it is the Minister of Justice.

How to get involved

You can find out about your local police team by visiting www.police.uk and using the ‘Find your neighbourhood’ function for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For Scotland, use www.scotland.police.uk/your-community.

There are opportunities to meet with local policing teams at beat meetings. www.police.uk gives information on local policing priorities, action taken to address them and the latest data on local crime.

Contact your Police and Crime Commissioner through www.gov.uk/police-and-crime-commissioners. Commissioners develop police and crime plans setting out their priorities for the area. These plans are reviewed annually and you can suggest new priorities. You can find your area police and crime plan via the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners website. Writing to your Police and Crime Commissioner about the challenges faced by your business will support them in developing their police and crime plans.

Police

Shops can be victims of criminal activity, from shop theft and anti-social behaviour to violent attacks and burglaries. Engaging with your local police force is a good idea so that, should there be a problem, you know who to contact and they know you.

In the community more widely, repeated issues of vandalism or public order in your area can impact on the overall viability of the high street, and the police will need to be involved in discussions about improvement and regeneration.

For local issues it may be more effective for booksellers to get in touch firstly with their neighbourhood policing team.

To raise wider issues of policing, there are 40 elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in England and Wales, one for each police force area – except in London and Manchester, where the role is part of the elected mayor’s responsibilities. The role of PCCs is to be the voice of the community and to hold the police to account. You can contact the PCC about how your area is policed.

To find your local Growth Hub visit the Growth Hub Finder Map at www.lepnetwork.net/growth-hubs

Both the www.gov.uk website and the Business Support helpline can direct businesses to sources of support. For the Business Support Helpline, telephone: 0300 456 3565 (Monday to Friday, 9am-6pm).

In Scotland, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice holds these responsibilities; in Northern Ireland it is the Minister of Justice.

The role of PCCs is to be the voice of the community and to hold the police to account.
2. National campaigns

There is an upsurge of interest around the UK in preserving and developing our local high streets, supported by a variety of campaigns and organisations.

SaveTheHighStreet.org

SaveTheHighStreet.org was founded in 2016 as an “industry movement on a mission to ensure diverse and successful high streets, now and for the long term”. The campaign is working alongside local authorities, councils, BIDs and a variety of other local champions to deliver community-led ‘placemaking’ on high streets around the UK. Its manifesto set out a vision for the high street and how that vision could be achieved through working together.

The organisation has a High Street Advisory Board including over 250 independent businesses and 50 other industry experts, plus strategic partners across the public and private sector and a growing network of ‘Local Champions’ across the UK. It is working with local authorities to build, support and empower community-led Placemaking Partnerships. These look at developing a town’s profile, the customer journey, high street sales and community-based economic growth. SaveTheHighStreet.org offers offer a four-month training programme as part of these partnerships to accelerate activity and impact locally.

How to get involved

You can sign up on the organisation’s website – savethehighstreet.org – to join the movement and receive their free newsletter. This includes advance information about their local and national campaigns, research on the industry standards for successful modern retailing, opportunities to get more involved and information about third parties providing products or services to help the high street.
Totally Locally

The Totally Locally campaign is a not-for-profit initiative set up to support local economies, encouraging independent businesses and shops to work with their towns to develop ideas for improving the vibrancy of the area’s economy. By signing up to the initiative, local businesses can access its resources including the Totally Locally Kit, which provides a timeline for a strategic marketing campaign, from initial meetings to involving the town and promoting your business for two years or more. The Totally Locally project was set up by a branding and marketing expert, Chris Sands, and is not a government initiative and or receive any funding from big organisations.

The initiative emphasises the difference to the area’s economy that spending just £5 in an independent local business can make. Its ‘Fiver Fest’ weeks celebrate the contribution of local independent businesses. Towns and high streets put on £5 offers over a week, to showcase the diversity and value of what they sell as well as saying thank you to the communities that support them.

At the time of going to press, Totally Locally has paused in taking on new towns while it regroups to deal with its popularity. We hope the campaign will begin to expand again, but in the meantime, it is worth looking at Totally Locally’s inspiring website, where you can also register your interest in the campaign for the future.

Information about Totally Locally at: www.totallylocally.org
2. National campaigns…continued

The Great British High Street

The Great British High Street (GBHS) was set up to support high streets around the UK, which it sees as crucial in creating jobs, nurturing small businesses and driving local and regional economies. The campaign believes that consumers seek a range of experiences on the high street, from shopping to leisure to health services; the most successful high streets offer a unique experience that people cannot get anywhere else.

Through the GBHS Awards, supported by its principal patron Visa, the organisation wants to encourage merchants and communities to get behind their local high streets, both by building local business-led partnerships between public and private sectors including retail, leisure, offices, banks and transport providers and by sharing skills and providing leadership.

The awards share leading examples of the ways high streets are succeeding in overcoming the challenges of a rapidly changing environment and will actively encourage the adoption of best practices across the nation.

Information, tools and resources from GBHS: www.thegreatbritishhighstreet.co.uk

Indie Retail

The Indie Retail website, alongside wider promotional activities, aims to educate and raise awareness among the general public about the benefits of buying products, and receiving ongoing support and advice, from independent retailers. It recognises the community and culture that independent retailers create, and gives retailers the chance to highlight their niche, their specialist products and services and their diversity. Shops can add a listing about themselves on the site.

Indie Retail runs the Best Small Shops competition which celebrates not only the commitment and creativity of entrepreneurial independent retailers on the UK’s High Streets, but also the central role independent retailers play in building local communities.

In 2018, BA member bookshop Book-ish, Crickhowell, won Best Small Shop and in 2019 three members were shortlisted – The Hours Café, Bookshop & Deli, Brecon, Kett’s Books, Wymondham and Book-ish again.

Information about Indie Retail and the Best Small Shops competition: www.indieretail.uk
NearSt

NearSt was founded in 2015 with a mission to get online shoppers back into high street shops by making shopping from real shops easier and faster than buying online. Near Street started with bookshops and bookshops are still close to the heart of the Near Street team. The platform connects the products in thousands of local stores to the millions of shoppers looking for them.

NearSt technology enables local shops to list live, in-store inventory in various ways. It is an online platform that integrates with all kinds of new and old POS systems, allowing NearSt to extract data about what’s available in your shop and feed it into partners such as Google. It makes your inventory visible to shoppers searching nearby.

NearSt charges new members a one-off set-up cost with no monthly fees and provides a UK support team as part of their service.

Information about NearSt: www.near.st

Small Business Saturday

Small Business Saturday UK is a grassroots, non-commercial campaign which highlights small business success and encourages consumers to ‘shop local’ and support small businesses in their communities. It is supported by American Express and has run in the UK for seven years.

The day itself is held on the first Saturday in December each year, but the campaign aims to have a lasting impact on small businesses.

On Small Business Saturday, customers across the UK are encouraged go out and support all types of small businesses, in shops, online and in offices. Many small businesses take part in the day by hosting events and offering discounts.

More information about Small Business Saturday: www.smallbusinesssaturdayuk.com

Consumers seek a range of experiences on the high street, from shopping to leisure to health services.
The Carnegie UK Trust

The Carnegie UK Trust was established to improve the lives and wellbeing of people throughout the UK, particularly those who are disadvantaged. It seeks to influence public policy to improve wellbeing through innovative practice and partnerships.

One area of interest for the Carnegie UK Trust has been promoting towns and supporting innovative practice in town communities. As the importance of towns and high streets has begun to rise up the public policy agenda, the Trust has developed several projects on the issue and examined how new government funding streams could have the most impact if directed at the wellbeing of town communities – putting social, environmental and democratic outcomes alongside the importance of thriving local economies.

The Trust says in its November 2019 report, Turnaround Towns UK, “We believe that towns are places to be proud of and places to be excited about”. It argues, “A focus on community wellbeing can unlock the potential of every place”. The report illustrates the importance of towns recognising their existing assets, as well as the significance of an enabling environment and external support.

How to get involved

The Carnegie UK Trust ‘Turnaround Towns UK’ report features case studies from a diverse selection of nine towns around the United Kingdom. To read about their ideas for change, you can access the report on the Trust website at:

www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/turnaround-towns-uk/

There is information on a range of related projects under the banner ‘Flourishing Towns’, for example looking at involving townspeople in decision making, at:

www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/theme/flourishing-towns/

A focus on can potential
A focus on community wellbeing can unlock the potential of every place.

The ATCM (Association of Town and City Management) is dedicated to helping town and city centres realise their natural roles both as prosperous locations for business and investment, and as focal points for vibrant, inclusive communities.

The ATCM works to ensure that the people leading the way in shaping this new urban landscape have the tools, information and resources required to enable our collective places to reach their full potential. Among its activities as the leading authority on town centre related public policy, the Association coordinates the secretariat of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Town Centres to increase the profile of town centres, town centre management and BIDs in Westminster on behalf of members across the UK.

ATCM is a not-for-profit organisation with members which come from the public, private and third sectors. They include key stakeholders and thought leaders who develop and implement shared visions, strategies and action plans for town and city centres throughout the UK and Ireland.

Information about ATCM: www.atcm.org

Community wellbeing
unlock the
development of every place.
3. Local media

Communities are often influenced by their local media in both old and new forms. Newspapers run campaigns to save local services; community and social media groups are increasingly prominent in keeping communities in contact; community or BBC local radio can reach new audiences. Developing links with local journalists/editors, radio producers/presenters and website content editors can be important in building momentum if you are campaigning for local change and engagement.

Hyper-local websites and town/area social media groups are a good way to keep up to date with your community and learn more about what they think about your role in the community. Use your own Facebook page or website to link to other local sites to promote information about community engagement.

Twitter, for example, is a very good platform to build a profile which is not all about pushing book sales and can create a local buzz. Using town hashtags (#) and addresses (@) of key local influencers can link you to a much wider group than your own followers. Be careful, however, of using inflammatory language. Contact the Booksellers Association for its A Guide to Social Media if you need help in building a Twitter profile.

When dealing with traditional local newspapers, remember that their profit margins are often very low and they may operate on a skeleton staff with sometimes only one reporter covering a large area and a small photography budget. Anything you can do to help them will help you get copy into their pages.

Provide press releases that are clear and can be more-or-less lifted into newspaper copy (but be aware that the editor may change everything!). Take photos of events and email them with the press release, or supply advance photos of your speakers or any campaign logo. Don’t forget any area newspapers as well as very local titles.

If you are speaking on local radio, have a clear plan in advance of what you want to say (a maximum of three clear points is usually the advice), and avoid being deflected from your message by the interviewer. There’s more information about writing press releases and dealing with the media in the BA’s Guide to Running Events and Publicising Your Shop.

Developing links with local media can be important in building campaign momentum.
4. In your community

Bookshops are at the heart of communities and ongoing engagement with your customers and surrounding community is a fundamental principle of being a local retailer.

There are a myriad of ways that you can get involved with your community, supporting the area and raising the profile of your bookshop. These are just a few ideas – your own initiative, tailored to your locality and customers, may be the most rewarding.

**BA events**  
Through the Booksellers Association, you can join in with a range of UK-wide bookselling events which receive high levels of national PR coverage and will support your own store in raising its profile. They may also give you an opportunity to hold related, special events to invite a new constituency to your store – teenagers, older people, people from different ethnic backgrounds, the LGBT+ community, and so on.

Events include World Book Day in the spring, Independent Booksellers Week in summer, and the Books Are My Bag and Bookshop Day autumn promotion which coincides with the launch of publishers’ new titles and with National Poetry Day. Look out for information in Bookselling Essentials magazine and on the BA website, www.booksellers.org.uk

**Community events**  
Supporting community events is a positive way to enable community cohesion – as well as driving footfall into your bookshop and raising your profile as a contributor to the economy and local society.

Community events could include literary, cultural or food festivals, village fêtes, bank holiday weekend events or annual events such as Christmas late opening or tree-lighting, Guy Fawkes Night or Valentine’s Day. These events are driven locally and often organised by local community groups and volunteers or by the local council. Find out who is involved. It may be possible to sell tickets for local events from your shop or provide a bookstall at others’ events. You could also get involved in organising the events, offer discounts on related stock or arrange your own related event on neighbouring days/weeks.

UK-wide bookselling events receive high levels of national PR coverage.
Local groups and societies
There are all sorts of local groups who may be useful to build as contacts, who can motivate their members to get involved in campaigns to improve your high street or address particular local issues. These can include civic societies or historical societies, museums and local venues; business groups such as chambers of commerce or more informal business networks; tourist offices and national park authorities; social, fundraising and campaigning groups such as the WI, Rotary or groups with particular local interests; activity groups such as sports clubs and photographic societies – the list is endless.

Local charities
Collecting money for charities in store through collections at tills or campaigns in your bookshop is a favourite way to engage with local communities. Many retailers who choose to collect a levy voluntarily for the carrier bag charge are now giving the money to local charities – if you do this, make sure you publicise the fact in your shop.

You can find details of the charities in your area on the Local Giving website.

Working with schools
Schools are an important partner for local bookshops and a powerful way of establishing links with your community. Through schools you can reach not only young people and future readers, but also their parents/carers and teachers’ networks. Working with schools might include key stage and library supply; running events with authors, books fairs and World Book Day celebrations; occasional purchasing and prizes or providing an advisory service to teachers.

You can find the details of schools in your local area via the www.gov.uk “Find a school” search tool, with contact details for senior teachers. And you may already have teachers among your customers.

Check out the BA’s Guide to Working with Schools if you need help.
Local groups can motivate their members to get involved in campaigns to improve your high street.

To set up a CIC, you would need:

- a ‘community interest statement’ setting out what the business plans to do
- an ‘asset lock’ – a legal promise stating that the company’s assets will only be used for its social objectives, and setting limits to the money it can pay to shareholders
- a constitution (models are provided by the CIC Regulator)
- to get your application to set up a CIC approved by the CIC Regulator.

Guidance on setting up a CIC is available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-interest-companies-how-to-form-a-cic

A Community Interest Company is a social enterprise – a business that helps people or communities. They are a special kind of limited company which exist to benefit the community rather than private shareholders.

Several bookshops have been established around the UK as successful CICs. There are examples where existing booksellers wanted to use their knowledge to establish a community-run shop in an area that needs the presence of a bookshop. Others have been established on their own as a viable way of funding and running a bookshop by involving the whole local community, in a district where perhaps there would not be enough profit to support a traditional bookshop model.

CICs usually have a limited number of paid staff (sometimes just one manager) and are staffed largely by volunteers. These volunteers can contribute according to their skills, providing back-office support or working front-of-house depending on their strengths. Often these bookshops operate as community hubs, providing space for local groups to meet and supporting local literacy including working with schools.
Booksellers’ Experience

Emma Corfield
Walters, Book-ish,
Crickhowell,
South Wales

“We need to give booksellers the enthusiasm and tools to get out there even more. Independent shops are good at adapting and surviving, and can work with other shops in their town to build a story about their individual community. But tips on doing so from behind the till are useful too, as there are so many sole owners who just don’t have the physical ability or time, and it can all seem a bit daunting,” believes Emma. “You need time and a thick skin to take this on.”

In 2015, Emma got involved in the Totally Locally movement, spearheading a campaign which emphasised that if all the townspeople spent £5 in local shops and not chains, it could be worth £1.63 million a year to Crickhowell’s economy.

“We began late night opening on December 1st with just two shops. Four years later, we had 2,000 people and organised a torchlight procession through town, supported by friends and community organisations. We also successfully campaigned to save a former pub from purchase by a supermarket and encouraged its development as independent shops and apartments.” By nurturing civic pride and developing the town as a destination, she also achieved an increase in sales for the bookshop.

Emma supported a local business’s application for the UK’s Best High Street 2018 competition, which encourages merchants and communities to get behind their high streets. “We got the whole town involved – we even had 200 people cleaning the streets before the judges came.” Emma was also awarded the ‘High Street Hero’ for Wales.

“From my perspective, the most helpful partners in these projects have been:

- the Totally Locally town support initiative
- Brecon Beacons Tourism and The National Park Authority
- our local Tourist Office (CRIC Centre)
- the Civic Society
- Local groups and clubs, for example the PTA, Rotary, local churches, various ‘friends’ groups such as Friends of the Library
- residents! “There is a lack of connection today. People want to come into the bookshop. Build conversations and a story, and they will come.”

For Emma, community engagement by booksellers focuses on:

- providing a community space (clubs and society meetings). “We have crafters, choirs, dementia-friendly groups, writing groups and various charities using our space for weekly and monthly meetings.”
- keeping an eye on the news and offering to help where we can (floods, cold weather, looking out for vulnerable regular customers). Being a ‘friend’ to your community
- events... but not just book-led.
  “For example, our ‘conversation cafés’ are now booked-in and are attracting a lot of interest. These include mindfulness, a death café and a climate change forum.”
• involving other local businesses when planning events, promoting local venues and sourcing food from local producers. Being visible and supporting/attending other town events
• schools. “There are a lot of booksellers better placed than I am to talk about what they do with schools, and it’s not just about taking authors in. There are a whole range of different ways of engaging with the community through its schools.”
• using social media to shout about your town, its businesses and locals – not just what’s going on in your own shop/business
• shop fronts and window displays. “You’re not just attracting people in, but also making the High Street look attractive; effort must be made.”

Elaine Silverwood, Book, Bean & Ice Cream, Kirkham, Lancashire

“My start point has to be: GET INVOLVED and don’t wait or expect others to sort out local problems and issues,” Elaine says.

“I was co-opted on to the Town Council in 2004 as an Independent Councillor when I had been very vocal about retaining our free car parks. In 2005, the Borough Council included in their budget their plans to introduce Pay & Display in Kirkham – very often seen as a cash cow by councils. I led a high-profile campaign with businesses and residents and lobbied the Council, explaining what would happen to Kirkham if charges were introduced. We won; literally by people power, as I secured over 5,000 letters of objection.

“I then formed and chaired the Kirkham Business Group, because I realised our weakness was not having a chamber of trade or local business group. The Council was able to use as an excuse that consultation on any matter could not be carried out in the town as there was no group to contact.

“I became an Independent Borough Councillor in 2007. There are huge advantages when wearing a number of hats – I can put up a fight for Kirkham from the ‘inside’ as and when issues arise.”

Elaine reports that a great deal of work was done for Kirkham Business Group by the students and tutors of UCLan (University of Central Lancashire). For a number of years, they undertook work in the town centre on footfall and market research. “My ‘payment’ for their services and skills was to give a number of talks at the university on retail, out of town developments and so on.”

“In 2012 I submitted a bid to the Mary Portas initiative and secured £100,000 for Kirkham. The real positive about this – not just the obvious funding – was that I was able to involve all the independent businesses on the high street, as well as local press, radio and TV, the University, churches, HMP Kirkham, Weeton Army Camp, and the MP and councillors. The ripple effect of being all-inclusive with these individuals had such an upbeat and positive effect on the town and ensured that they all remained involved well after the Mary Portas bid was completed.”
Since then, Elaine has been asked to represent Kirkham on three occasions in fighting out-of-town retail parks – successfully in two cases. She is involved in the Future High Streets bid, an ongoing process, and is working with the local planning department on the Local Plan for the High Street, planning for the ‘vitality and vibrancy of the town centre’.

“It doesn’t take very long for local media to know who to come to when they want a quote. The positive is that it’s great for the shop, as journalists always say: ‘Elaine Silverwood from Book, Bean & Ice Cream…’!”

“I have used to my advantage on a number of occasions being a member of the BA. I have been able to mention the work the organisation has done on business rates, fighting the unfairness of taxes, championing the small indies, etc. This at least means it sounds as if I know what I’m talking about!”

Tamsin Rosewell,
Kenilworth Books,
Warwickshire

“The best advice I can give any fellow indie bookshop is ‘Be Independent’. I know that sounds achingly obvious, but I’m always dismayed by the number of indies who seem to be trying to be smaller versions of Waterstones, or feeling that they too need to be leaping on heavily-marketed trend bandwagons. Let Waterstones be Waterstones. You be You,” Tamsin advises.

“You are free to create and build your own networks that work for you, in your area. Each of our worlds is different, and I don’t think manufacturing a generic ‘local campaign’ to tell you about would work; something that makes sense in your area might mean little in mine.

You might have a tourist trade, I don’t. You might have a university in your town, I don’t. It also has to work for you as a person – I’m a deeply political human being and love the challenges of policy thinking; but you might not be interested at all. Play to your strengths, what are you interested in? What’s your area like?”

Here are a couple of things that Kenilworth Books does, to set you thinking:

- **Sweetie Jars** “We work with schools and school library services of all kinds from the Cotswolds, through Coventry, right up to Lichfield and over to Leicestershire, so supporting the school network is extremely important to us. Our town has 10 local primary schools, and there are another 10 or so immediately outside the town with which we work regularly.

  “We started a system where, when people buy from us, if they tell us that they have children/grandchildren at a local school, we pop a token worth 50p into a sweetie jar labelled for that school. At the end of the academic year we tot up the total for each school and convert it into our own book tokens. It costs the school nothing, and it increases their awareness that we are both knowledgeable and active in the school network. The school can then ask us to buy them books, or they can give out the tokens to students as prizes, as they wish. Word spreads in the playground and in school newsletters; new parents discover us each year, and those who
already know us will buy from us rather than go 20 yards over the square and buy from WHSmith. We have a paragraph explaining how it works always on hand, to go into school newsletters.”

- **Town Notice Board** “Our town library, like many others, has had its resources eroded. There used to be a ‘What’s On’ notice board outside our library, but that has long gone. We used the wall space behind the till area to create a town notice board. We can’t put stock there, so it seemed a good use of rare wall space! We will willingly put up notices for local events from Pilates and mindfulness courses to theatre performances and concerts, for local societies and fundraising campaigns. People come into the bookshop because they’ve been told that the town notice board is here. All the time, we get new people who have just moved in being directed here by estate agents or other local shops. If you have a vacant corner, welcome the town into your shop by showing off all it has to offer.”

- **The ‘Yes’**. “Networks and business are built by saying ‘yes’. If someone offers you the chance to do something you haven’t done before, say yes. Give it a go. Sometimes you’ll then have to work out the best way to do it and the first time can a bit scary and stressful. But being an active, high-profile and positive force in your area is totally worth the effort.

“We now: act as a ticket office for local concerts and theatre performances, take in work experience students from a local SEN college, write reviews for family magazines that reach 115,000 people in our region, have raised nearly £6,000 for our local hedgehog rescue, advise dozens of book groups in our area, sponsor the local arts festival and have live radio broadcasts from the bookshop – to name a few things.

“Our physical space is tiny; in fact the whole shop is about the same size as the ladies’ loo at Waterstone’s Piccadilly! We’ve grown our business not by increasing our space, but by taking the bookshop out into the region, by inviting more parts of our community to become part of our world, and by buzzing with activity and interesting conversation.”

- **Link to librarians** “Support your local libraries and school libraries. I hear people in the book industry talk as if libraries and bookshops are somehow competitors, and nothing could be further from accurate! Libraries make readers; without libraries our business would be poorer. I’ve lost count of how many times people have come into the bookshop and said something like: ‘I’ve discovered Kate Atkinson at the library and I love her work and want to read it all – can you order me a few at a time, starting at the first?’ or ‘My school librarian said I might like Julian Sedgwick’s books and I love them! Now its my birthday and I want everything he’s written.’

“We send people to our local library, and they send people to us. If we have uncorrected proofs we don’t want, we’ll often pass them on to librarians, and if we have POS material we won’t use, we give it to schools and libraries too. Having a strong relationship with local librarians, and actively defending the need for local and school libraries, is a really important part of what we do and who we are.”
Meera Ghanshamdas, Moon Lane Ink CIC, Lewisham

“Any bookshop is already a community enterprise: we give advice, talk to customers and give a lot back to the community. Actual sales are probably twenty percent of our day,” says Meera, who is manager of Community Interest Company, Moon Lane Ink.

“But the beneficial thing about being a CIC is that we have an ethos, the focus is always the community. Whenever you have a wobble about how to do things or drive the business forward, someone always says: ‘This is a CIC, it’s not about profit’. And we’ve seen how passionate the community is about us, it’s a symbiotic relationship. It’s a constant conversation: how can we further the dialogue?”

Community ethos

Moon Lane Ink bookshop opened in March 2018 after Tamara Macfarlane, owner of award-winning children’s bookshop, Tales on Moon Lane in Herne Hill, decided to develop her interest in social enterprise and share the knowledge Tales’ booksellers had gained. Tales already worked widely with schools and the community, but before establishing the CIC, Tamara was mentored by Cambridge Judge Business School’s Social Ventures Programme.

“There are two ways of setting up a CIC – either it can be a stand-alone business, set up from new, or you can re-register an existing limited company as a CIC, as long as it does not have shareholders,” Meera reports. “Tamara wanted to expand into a new location, so it made sense to set up a new entity. Lewisham was chosen because there is need there. Tales is only two miles away, but it’s totally different here. Lewisham Borough has the highest proportion of children, young and old people in economic deprivation in the whole of England. But it has several outstanding primary and secondary schools.” Seventy-six percent of the school-age population identify as BAME.

“I am passionate about changing the landscape – not just about race, though I am from a BAME background myself, but about class, disability, gender, LGBT issues, culture… wherever voices are in a minority. It’s about breaking down barriers to access, to encourage people in.” Moon Lane Ink aims not only to improve access to books where minorities are represented in the content, but also to improve diversity in bookselling and publishing careers.

Stock is curated carefully so that content reflects diversity and inclusivity across the board, relying not only on publishers’ sales reps, “Who know us well,” but keeping an eye on industry data and social media about authors and titles. “But any time I offer books, I’ll offer both titles with a diversity aspect and those which are not issue-based. Just because someone is from one background, we don’t want them to feel a book doesn’t belong to them because it features a different community.”

The store acts as a community hub, using the upper floors as hire spaces where people run a range of workshops and a monthly local councillors’ surgery. The CIC advertises events as part of the hire charge. “This brings in people from further away. Participants sometimes say they didn’t know we were here, or it’s the first time they’ve been in a bookshop.”

“I come from a business background and focusing on one audience is not a sustainable model for bookshops. The better you access the full diversity of your community, the more sustainable it is.”
Schools
Moon Lane Ink organises many schools’ activities. “One school has just booked in 19 slots of our free story-time sessions. It’s a way of raising future readers and reaching the parents whose kids bring them in,” Meera says. “We hold regular author tours to local schools. Kids love it, they’re really engaged and ask a lot of good questions. We’ll look after authors for schools and provide book sales alongside events. We run a literary festival for all Lewisham schools, bringing a lot of BAME authors – it’s important to show who is writing, not just the characters in books. We have a project with one secondary school to encourage students to see future careers and to challenge stereotypes. That school has set up a permanent bookshop on site.”

“Lewisham has a secondary school book award, spearheaded by amazing school librarians and this year we’ll be hosting award voting via our website and providing shortlisted books at a discount to Lewisham pupils coming to the shop. We set up a new primary award this year, in partnership with a school librarian and council worker, Ruth Bosner. Choosing six books each in four different categories, we offered the titles to schools at a discount. Schools across the borough engaged and teachers thanked us, as it meant an injection of new titles for the school.”

The CIC’s secondary school Enterprise Days are an Apprentice-style chance for competing groups to plan how to set up and market a pop-up bookshop, curating the list and working to a budget. “They pitch their ideas at the end, and the winner gets £1,000 to establish a real pop-up. Children who don’t read develop a whole new respect for books in the process.”

“Tracy Kenny
Kett’s Books,
Wymondham,
Norfolk

The long-established bookshop in Wymondham was set to close at the end of 2013. But a group of 16 locals, all strangers but lovers of books, met up that September and decided to save a bookshop for the town. In just four months they raised loans, secured a lease, recruited volunteers, designed branding, sourced stock, and opened in February 2014 as a Community Interest Company (CIC).

Tracy Kenny is the paid manager, the only non-volunteer. She had worked in a big organisation and also run her own business, but she and the team had no background in bookselling. “I always say, every book tells a story, but not the one you’d expect. It’s where we got it, was it invoiced, can we return it…?”

Twenty-two volunteers serve in the shop, while another 30 help behind the scenes with elements such as social media, invoicing, picture-book readings and author events, depending on their strengths. A voting members’ group guides the running of the enterprise, and there is also a wider Friends’ scheme. The bookshop has recently established a book group for parents with little time to read, keeping selections to books with 130 pages or fewer, run by two volunteers with young children.

“We curate books lists for teachers and build links with literacy leads and librarians. I also do a talk on diversity and inclusivity for teachers who attend an OU reading for pleasure group, so that teachers from non-BAME backgrounds understand that the dialogue needs to change.
“Our volunteers are talented people – and they benefit too,” reports Tracy. “One said that without the bookshop his mental health would have failed. A younger woman learned skills she could use in a job later on. The shop has given people a reason to get out, a friendship group, and an important role to play.”

Shop facilities were improved for volunteers, and the sales space expanded, with help from two BA James Patterson grants. The team continue to learn all the time and to increase their local profile. “We’re doing more with BAMM and BA initiatives, attending publisher events, and are involved in the local literary festival. HarperCollins donated £2,000 for a new website, and we commissioned artwork from a local artist to update our branding. ‘We are building our work with schools in the area,’ reports Tracy.

One community

“During 2019 we devised a community outreach project called One Community, One Book. We selected a single book to promote to the entire town over the course of a year. The author similarly committed to us, and visited four times in the year, attending picnics and care homes as well as literary events with us. We were able to reach a large number of people, build conversations and form friendships that wouldn’t have happened otherwise.

“The project was supported by a BA Diversity and Inclusiveness grant, but we broke new ground in national/local collaborations by coming third place nationally in the first round of the new Community Matters grants from Waitrose supermarket – our local branch supports our shop and offered to put our project forward for the award. We were awarded £1,000 from Waitrose, in addition to receiving a generous gift card from their ‘green coin’ scheme.”

Kett’s Books makes a small profit each year. “We are a social enterprise, and it’s about giving back, not getting rich,” Tracy says. “We offer discounts wherever we can. The sofa is not a sofa, it’s an invitation to come in, and use the shop as a place to escape if someone needs it. Our physical presence and the continuity we offer is our edge over the internet. Children will run up to us and say: ‘You’re the lady who gave us that book’. Our business model is almost ‘Be Kind’.”

Catherine Hetherington,
The New Bookshop,
Cockermouth, Cumbria

The New Bookshop turned 50 in 2018 and so is a far from ‘new’ presence in the small town of Cockermouth, Cumbria. “My parents opened the bookshop when I was a child,” says Catherine, who now runs the store with her husband. “It’s a focal point in the middle of town. There are still people around who remember when it first opened, some of whom weren’t sure it would survive. They and their families still come to the shop.”

Helping the town recover

The bookshop has certainly faced its share of challenges in surviving. In 2009 the town centre was badly flooded with water damaging the store and stock. “It was supposed to be a once-in-a-thousand-year occurrence, then it happened again in 2015,” reports Catherine. “Both experiences were horrendous. The mental strain
was awful, especially the second time when we’d only just got back to how we were. The town was buoyant, it had recovered, and then we were flooded again. It has made us all very aware of climate change.”

“The situation did bring a lot of people together,” she says. “The local auction company had offices at the top of the hill, and within a day had offered eight or nine businesses the chance to trade from there. We could rent a space and keep things going on a small scale for seven months.”

After the 2009 flood, Catherine wanted to take action to help the community recover and joined the local Chamber of Commerce. “We needed to unite, and the Chamber became a force to reckon with. We managed to attract grants to market the town again. At the time of the flood, we had a lot of media attention, but it’s only a news story and the media soon vanished, while it wasn’t such a quick fix for the houses and businesses that were devastated. But our customers were determined to keep using us.”

Providing a local hub

The shop is even more of a local hub now, with a large coffee shop created from an adjoining garage in 2011. “It’s another string to our bow and really helps to make the shop welcoming. The café and bookshop are easily accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs, and local companies and groups sometimes use the large area of the coffee shop for their meetings – we don’t charge them, as long as they buy a coffee! We also hold story-time for young children, book groups and a supper club.” The latter grew out of a cookery book club which has now widened to cover other titles, but always involves food as well as books.

“Our author events are popular – locals like the fact that there’s something different in town to go to. Once we’ve had a successful event with a publisher, they’ll come again. We have some big authors as well as local interest events.”

“Like many bookshops, we know that good service, attention and friendliness will bring people back”. Cockermouth is boosted by holiday trade and regular second-home visitors, but the bookshop is there all year for the local community. “When I walk along the street, I say hello to lots of customers, they know me by name,” Catherine adds. “We welcome some people who come in every day who may be a bit lonely. We know their names and what they want to read, and if we have time, we’ll have a chat. Books seem to be a great way to get people together.”
My Bookshop’s Contribution

| My business employs: | |
| My shop is open: | |
| Total hours a week my staff spend serving local customers: | |
| My shop provides the following services (e.g. café, events): | |

| I have invested: | |
| My business pays salaries/wages of: | |

| Community activities or charity work we have supported or funded over the last year: | |
| • from my bookshop: | |

| • in business rates annually to fund local services: | |

| Community activities and charity work we plan to support over the next year: | |
| Bookshop/related events for local people we have held over the last year: | |
| Bookshop/related events for local people we plan to hold over the next year: | |

| Number of schools my bookshop works with: | |

| Social media the bookshop uses to engage with customers, promoting our town/area in the process (tick): | |
| ○ Twitter  ○ Facebook  ○ Instagram  ○ LinkedIn  ○ Pinterest  ○ Snapchat  ○ YouTube |
### Key Stakeholder Checklist

**Local Councils (district or county) and Combined Authorities**

Combined Authority/Local Authority name:

Ward Councillor/Contact name:

Contact details:

**Directly Elected Mayor**

Contact details:

**Business Improvement Districts (BID) and Town Teams**

Name of BID/Town Team:

Contact details:

**Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth Hubs**

LEP name:

Contact details:

**Police**

Police Community Support Officer name:

Contact details:

Police and Crime Commissioner name:

Contact details:

**Other local business organisations (e.g. Chamber of Commerce, business networks):**

Name of organisation:

Contact details:
Political representatives

Local Member of Parliament (Westminster) MP name:
Contact details:

Scottish Parliament MSP name:
Contact details:

Welsh Assembly AM name:
Contact details:

Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly MLA name:
Contact details:

Local media

Local newspaper(s):
Editor or reporter contact details:

Local radio station(s):
Editor or reporter contact details:

Local community social media sites:
Contact details:
Contact us

Address:
Booksellers Association
6 Bell Yard
London
WC2A 2JR
T: 020 7421 4640
F: 020 7421 4641
E: mail@booksellers.org.uk

Online:
www.booksellers.org.uk
www.nationalbooktokens.co.uk
www.batch.co.uk
www.facebook.com/thebooksellersassociation
www.twitter.com/BAbooksellers
www.twitter.com/IndieBound_uk
www.linkedin.com/company/the-booksellers-association