

# TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

For encore leaders who want to begin a new encore effort, this resource offers a few approaches to consider as you're starting out. It's based in part on the experiences of about a dozen 2013-2014 Encore Innovation Fellows, a cohort of leaders who took on year-long assignments to advance the encore idea.

## TEN TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ENCORE EFFORTS

1. **Do your research.** First, find out whether there are other encore leaders near you. Check out the list of Encore Network [members](#) and the profiles in Part 3, including national programs you might want to invite to expand into your community.

You may not need to reinvent the wheel. Find out what already exists: Where are efforts housed, and who is leading them? Can what you envision complement, extend or replicate an existing effort?

2. **See it in action.** There's no substitute for seeing something with your own eyes. Once you've done some reading, look for opportunities to experience how others may be implementing encore ideas and programs. Can you visit an encore effort or meet with an encore leader in person, on video or via Skype, or set up a phone conversation or Google hangout? Can you join a workshop or event, within driving distance?

Think a little bigger, too: Maybe there's someone to visit or a program to explore near friends, your children or your vacation destination. Networking is vital when beginning a new encore effort. Contact local leaders to talk about your ideas; that outreach is critical whether you decide to join forces or to launch a complementary effort.

3. **Engage a group of like-minded colleagues** who love to be in on the ground floor of something new – and are also willing to roll up their sleeves to get things done. Who else in your community is interested in the encore idea? Who could benefit? Consider your professional and personal networks as well as organizations, public agencies, businesses and individuals who have an interest in new systems and structures that recognize the benefits of the encore stage of life. Start small and build momentum: Pull a few people together to talk about your vision and potential next steps. A core leadership team provides energy, ideas and connections.
4. **Expand your reach.** Once you've established a core group, think broader, wider and more diverse. Who isn't in the room? This could take you in many different directions – for example, reaching out to public officials and businesses that are newer to your community; contacting people returning to the workforce, and getting to know community and faith-based groups, education institutions and social service agencies. A good image is concentric circles, getting wider and wider as you grow your encore effort. Seek people with different skills – like communications, finance, event-planning, organization development and collaboration-building.
5. **Find a physical home.** Whether it's someone's living room, a co-working space or a community meeting room, your group needs an accessible place to gather. It's also important to find a place where your encore effort can belong and begin to craft an identity. If you are going to raise money to support and sustain your encore effort, an organizational home or some other formal structure is vital.

## BUILDING AN ENCORE COMMUNITY – LESSONS FROM MARICOPA COUNTY, ARIZONA

For an on-the-ground example of a thriving encore ecosystem, there's no better place to start than Arizona's Maricopa County. For nearly 15 years, the county – which includes Phoenix and over two dozen surrounding municipalities – has been developing programs and initiatives that engage experienced adults in social purpose work; educating nonprofits about ways to incorporate encore talent into their work; and encouraging collaborations between government, higher education, nonprofits, funders and community members. Learn more in this [new case study](#).

6. **Craft a clear and cogent message to tell your particular encore story.** How will you describe what you are doing and why you do it? How will you incorporate your research, your personal story, how your effort is different from or complementary to existing programs, and what you know about community needs?

As you move from encore vision to a real, living project, you're going to talk to lots of people. A short "elevator speech" and a one-page handout can take you a long way in the early days. It's also smart to cultivate relationships with local journalists, especially those in their 40s, 50s and older. Members of the media who are nearing the encore stage themselves are often interested in the encore idea because it resonates with things they are experiencing in their own lives.

7. **Seek support.** Get comfortable asking for specific kinds of help; it gets easier with practice! Depending on the size and scope of your effort, you may need to raise money, find space, ask for in-kind donations or consult experts in fields like marketing or web design. Celebrate when people say "yes" – which they often will – and use "no, thanks" responses as good opportunities to ask where else you might find what you need. It makes sense to seek out people in their own encores who offer a wealth of talents and have a strong personal interest in this work.
8. **Get social.** Social media can be intimidating if you're a novice, but its power as a tool for communication and promotion is enormous – and growing. If you are comfortable on Twitter, LinkedIn, or Facebook, you can build a virtual community of supporters and advisors. If you're new to social media, you can get acclimated on Encore.org's social media channels; follow @encorecareers on Twitter or join the [encore group](#) on LinkedIn. Meetup.com can also be used to promote local events.
9. **Create a roadmap.** Even though it may change, make a plan that includes key steps to develop your concept, then share it with others and decide on your approach. Check out this [Community Experience Partnership roadmap](#) for how to develop a plan to engage encore talent in community change strategies
10. **Live with questions.** The encore idea is still young – not yet a decade old. Recognize that you are a leader in a new field. What you do now helps to build new knowledge, new networks and new ways forward. That means living with a certain level of uncertainty, which is also a kind of freedom. But you're not alone. Ask lots of questions, be curious and know that the answer to "what comes next?" might not always be clear. Sometimes there will be a good road map; sometimes you'll "launch and learn." That's how any movement grows.

## TELLING YOUR STORY, FROM PLAN TO PITCH

Encore leaders need to be able to share their story in a range of settings. Whether you're a natural public speaker or someone less familiar with the spotlight, invest some time in crafting your message.

Start with the *Encore Toolkit for Community Programming – A Step-by-Step Guide to Organizing an Encore Panel*. This [resource](#) is intended to be used in conjunction with the *Encore Career Handbook* to introduce the encore idea to community members.

Take a look at these [free resources](#) from storytelling expert Andy Goodman, who's worked closely with many leaders in the encore community. You can also take a look at these [short videos](#), in which several encore leaders tell their own stories.

The Vital Aging Network in Minnesota has published some "[Words of Wisdom](#)" for planning efforts in their Vital Communities Tool Kit. You may find their suggestions about specific tools and approaches helpful.