EDRC
Energy Demand Research Centre

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) facilitation guide for community groups

March 2026

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1. Purpose of this guide

This guide supports community groups, volunteers and local organisations to run their own Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) workshop. The purpose of REM is to help groups understand the impacts of their activities, including the less visible or unexpected changes their work creates. This supports evaluation. It can also be used to map the range of activities conducted by community groups.
The guide provides everything you need to plan, facilitate and reflect on a REM session, even if you have never run one before.

2. What is Ripple Effects Mapping?

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is a participatory, visual method for exploring the intended and unintended impacts of a project, programme, activity or community group. It brings people together to reflect, share stories, and co-create a visual map of the “ripples” their work has generated.

REM has four core elements:

- Appreciative Inquiry (AI) – short storytelling interviews that identify positive experiences and impacts. You could call these paired conversations.
- Participatory approach – participants are active co-creators.
- Interactive group reflection – everyone builds the map together.
- Radiant Thinking (mind-mapping) – impacts are visually mapped outward from a central activity or theme.

REM is suitable for groups of all sizes, especially those who want to:

- Understand the difference they make
- Capture “hidden” or hard-to-measure impacts
- Assess how far impacts reach beyond volunteers and immediate beneficiaries
- Learn from participants, volunteers, partners or residents
- Use the final map for evaluation, storytelling or funding bids

3. When to Use REM

REM is especially useful when you want to:

- Understand outcomes beyond numbers (e.g., confidence, relationships, unexpected benefits)
- Bring people together to reflect on shared experiences

- Evaluate a project shortly after it ends
- Build motivation, belonging or a sense of achievement within a group
- Strengthen community voice and ownership

Sessions typically work best with 12–20 participants, although smaller and larger groups are possible.

4. Planning Your REM Workshop (Checklist)

Preparation Checklist:

☐ **Clarify your purpose:** What do you want to learn from REM?

☐ **Choose the activity/project** to place in the centre of the map

☐ **Book a venue** with wall space or table space

☐ **Gather materials**: post-it notes, marker pens, large paper/flipchart sheets (wall lining paper is a great low cost option), blue-tack or masking tape, camera/phone to take photos of the finished map

☐ **Prepare Appreciative Inquiry questions** (samples below)

☐ **Think about timings**

- If conducting a large mapping session of all impacts or mapping all activities we recommend 2–2.5 hours for the session (10-15 min Appreciative Inquiry, 70 min Map creation, 30–45 min Reflection and next steps)
- If conducting a mapping session for one specific activity, or if you are planning multiple REM sessions, the session could be much shorter (approx. 45-60 minutes)

☐ **Invite participants / advertise your event** ideally, you want a mix of people who were involved in organising the activity or initiatives (volunteers), people who attended the activity or initiatives, and any project or event partners

☐ **Arrange refreshments** if possible

☐ **Optional**: Prepare digital mapping software for later (e.g., XMind, Miro)

5. Facilitation Roles

You can run a REM session with one facilitator, but two is ideal, especially with larger sessions. They can also be part of the REM session if they have things to contribute.

Lead Facilitator

- Guides the session
- Asks prompt questions
- Keeps time
- Ensures all voices are heard
- Manages the running of the session

Map Facilitator / Scribe

- Captures ideas onto post-its or directly onto the map
- Organises and clusters ideas
- Helps maintain structure

6. Room Set-up

There is lots of flexibility in how you set up the room. But we have found the following to be a good setup:

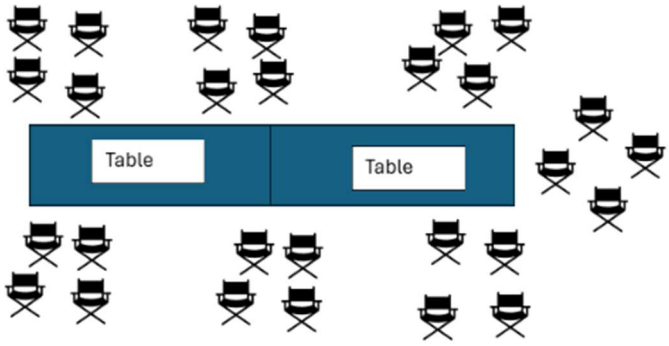

Figure 1: Suggested room layout

Have the tables in the middle of the room, and chairs around the side of the table. In this example the tables will have the blank large bit of paper (or wall lining paper) on them. Distribute the post-it notes around the table, with a selection of pens.

Alternative set up: You can also run this session where the large bit of paper (or backing wallpaper) is attached to a wall. This set-up will require people getting up and moving around. Things to think about if using this set-up:

- Session numbers – if you have lots of people it will require lots of people getting up and moving around. Do you have enough space?
- Mobility and accessibility needs - can everyone see the map, is there enough space for people to move around and stick post-it notes to the wall?

Parking Space
We recommend having a separate blank bit of paper (e.g. A3 size) where people can put any post-it notes that don't directly fit into the REM session. For example, any negative issues, or side-topics that people want to raise. This ensures that you hear everyone's voices and don't forget anything, but that these issues don't dominate the conversations and the wider REM session, since the primary focus is to capture the good impacts that your group and its activities have had.

7. Running the Workshop: Step-by-Step

This section gives you everything you need to deliver a REM session smoothly.

Step 1: Welcome and Introductions (5 - 10 minutes)

Explain to attendees what the purpose of the session is, what the session will entail and explain some 'ground rules'. If your group has a set of values that it works to, you can remind people what they are at this point. This can help with reminding any challenging voices/opinions to respect everyone else.

Sample script:
'Welcome everyone. We're here to explore the impacts of the [activity / group] – not just the planned outcomes, but also looking at the wider impacts, changes, stories, successes that have emerged from the [activity / group]. This is a collaborative process, and there are no right or wrong answers.

There are 3 main sections to the session:

1. *First we will get into pairs and ask each other 3-4 questions. The purpose of this is to focus attention on the task at hand*
2. *Second we'll start creating the ripple map using post-it notes, and this big sheet of paper*
3. *Lastly, we'll take a step back and reflect on the map we have created, and add anything that needs adding*

Just to go through some ground rules which help with the running of the session

- *Everyone's view is important, and we're hoping everyone here will have something they want to share.*

- *There are no right or wrong answers.*
- *Please think about 'active listening'. When the other person is answering the question, give them a chance to speak, try not to interrupt them.*
- *Please remember we want to focus specifically on [activity / group] and the impacts / changes / successes that have emerged from it. If you have things you would like to raise that are not related to this, please write them down on a post-it note and stick them on this 'parking spot' bit of paper. We'll review these at the end.'*

Step 2: Paired Interview (10-15 minutes)

Participants pair up and interview each other using the 2-3 pre-defined questions. These paired interviews is also called 'Appreciative Inquiry'.
The purpose of these the paired interview is to get everyone talking about the subject you are wanting to build the REM map around. We have found that it doesn't really matter what questions people answer nor whether they have time to answer all the questions you have proposed. The purpose of this section is a sort of 'warm-up' in preparation for creating the REM map. It can be helpful if the person listening jots down notes about what they hear, but it isn't essential to do this.

Developing your questions
We have provided a list of sample questions in the appendix. These are questions we developed (based on questions from other REM studies). You can tailor these to the needs and purpose of your REM session. The important bit of the questions is how they are phrased, rather than the specifics that they cover. You will notice they are very 'positive' in their phrasing.
To help you decide how to choose the questions for the Appreciative Inquiry, followed by the workshop, please think about what questions you have as a community group regarding your impact. For example:

- What do you want to get out of the ripple effects mapping session?
- Are there specific areas of impact that you want to know more about? These could be the types of impact that you intended to achieve but find hard to measure, or they could be impacts that you haven't thought of but are part of the value of your group to the wider community.
- Thinking of the attendees you have invited what input/feedback would you like to get from them?
- Do you want the attendees to identify what activities/events they think are important? And most beneficial?
- How do you hope to use the Ripple Effects Map that will result from this workshop? For example, do you plan to use it to help you apply for funds from existing and/or new funding sources? If you plan to use it to

help you apply for funds, it can be useful to know the headline criteria that funders are looking for.

Top tips for facilitating the paired interviews/conversations:

- Have a quick scan of the numbers to see whether you'll need any groups of 3
- Think about the people in the room - do you want specific people to be paired up or does it not matter? For example, if you have a mix of volunteers and attendees, do you want to pair volunteer with volunteer, or volunteer with attendee? It can be useful to think about the different perspectives that each person can bring to the session and how you can best utilise this.
- Have the questions on display: It can be helpful for participants to see the questions, either have them printed out or place copies around the room for attendees to look at.
- Set a timer to help with time keeping and give a 2 minute warning before the end of the 10 minutes.
- Remind people that they should hear from both people (trying to encourage any dominant voices to listen). You could say when 5 minutes are up, to encourage people to swap roles.

Sample script:

We'll have 10 minutes to interview each other. Here are the questions [read them out and identify where they might be displayed].

As a reminder we want to hear from everyone, so make sure you give yourselves enough time for you both to answer the questions. It's not a problem if you don't have time to go through all three questions, just try your best.

If everyone can get into pairs, we'll start the 10 minutes, ask each other the questions. Feel free to write notes on a post-it note if you wish. I'll let you know when you have 2 minutes left'.

Step 3: Creating the Map

This is where you start creating the map. You will ask each pair to share something from their paired conversation, and it will be placed on the map. During the session you may have to review the map and move some things around, but that is easily done if using post-it notes.

The time spent on creating the map all depends on the topic you are trying to cover, and the number of people attending the session. When we ran the session with community groups to map all the activities they conducted and some of the impacts of these activities we allocated approximately 70 minutes to this section from a 2-2.5hr session. As a guide we'd recommend at least 50% of the total session time to be allocated to making the map.

There are several ways to capturing information from the pairs:

- Go around the room and verbally ask each individual to share something that the person they spoke to in the paired interviews mentioned. Capture this on a post-it note (in short form / bullet points) and place on the map
- Ask each pair to write on a post-it note one point that was mentioned in the interview and place it on the map

This initial first 'round' the room of sharing information is the start of your ripples – **first ripples**.
After you have the first ripples, encourage some follow-up questions (Please see appendix) to get some more information from the person who has shared something, or the wider group. Encourage people to build on each other's stories. It's your role to ensure the process keeps moving, the map keeps evolving and everyone has the opportunity to share something.

Top tips for facilitating the creation of the map:

- Be aware of how many people you have in the room, and the time you have. You may need to encourage some people to cut short their explanation or get them to write more information on post-it notes to ensure you get around everyone. This can be particularly important once people have warmed to the theme, and you are into the second and even third round of ripples.
- Ask follow-up questions/prompts to capture more ripples (see Appendix).
- Stay fairly flexible – you need to ensure you hear from everyone in the room (either verbally or written on post-it notes), but you also need to let the map evolve. This can be a daunting to facilitate but just trust the process.
- As each person shares something, the map will continue to evolve. At some points it might be appropriate to move post-it notes to different sections, to group together different thoughts / themes together. Some people may start clustering some post-it notes – this is useful!
- Encourage people to build on each other's points / stories. The REM process works best through using all the different viewpoints and minds in the room to build the ripples. Everyone brings a different perspective or memory of an event/activity.

Sample script:
Thanks everyone for spending some time interviewing each other. We'll now start creating the map. We're going to go around the room and everyone is going to share something from the paired interview. Please share something that the other person said, don't share something that you wanted to mention. At this stage we're only going to share one thing, to ensure everyone gets to share something, but there will be plenty of opportunity, if you want, to share

all the things you discussed. Please use the post-it notes and write anything down that you want.
While you are sharing your point, we'll try to capture it on a post-it note and put it on the map. During this process we might need to move the post-it notes around, when we group thoughts.
[Person 1 shares something, while someone captures this on a post-it note. Try to keep 1 main point to 1 post-it for ease of reading]
Thank you for sharing that. Did anyone else discuss this point? or have anything to add to this point?
[hear from other groups – and put more post-it notes down if required]
[ask some follow-up questions / prompts]
Move to person 2, and so on.

Step 4: Group Reflection and Debrief

This is an opportunity to stop, step-back and review the map that has been created. Depending on the timing of the session it might be appropriate to take a little refreshment break. We have found that getting people to stand up, move around and look at the map in their own time can bring some more energy in the room. Creating the map can be intense!

Sample script:
Thanks everyone, we have a great map created here. As we approach the end of the session we'll spend some time to reflect on the map and add anything that we think is missing. Please have a look at the map, grab a post-it note and add anything you think is needed.
[Sometimes it can be appropriate to give a quick run through of what you can see on the map e.g. this section has topics on x, this section has topics on y, we have lots of ripples emerging from z but not as many from x. If anyone has any further things to add please grab a post-it note]

Step 5: Wrap Up / Close the Session

This is where you conclude the session, acknowledge any points in the 'parking space', and highlight / explain what will happen next.

4. What Next – things to consider

What you do next, depends on what the purpose of your REM session is. Here are some things to consider for the post-session processing:

- **Take photos of the map**: At the very least we'd recommend you take some photos of the map. You and your group have spent a lot of time creating the map, and even though you can keep the paper and the post-it notes you can guarantee some post-its will fall off.
    - **We recommend using the 'post**-it note' app. This is a free to download app, created by post-it by 3M. It enables you to take a photo of the map and the app digitises the post-it notes. It is quite simple to get started, but practice using it before the session. The app can struggle to read some hand-writing so it might require you to review some of the captures. ALSO TAKE NORMAL PHOTOS as a back up (sometimes the post-it app doesn't capture everything). The post-it app photos can be exported to several other useful softwares, such as excel, Trello, Miro, powerpoint or pdf.
    -
- **Use a mind-map software to digitise the post-it notes:** if you wanted to create a map which highlights the different ripples you can digitise the post-it notes.

    - We recommend using Miro, a free to use online website. It's easy to move things around and display the different ripples. You may have your own favourite tool.

- **Use AI to summarise the ripples:** if you just want a summary of the ripples AI (e.g. Microsoft Co-Pilot / Chat GPT) can be useful in digitising the photos you took, turning them into documents and creating a summary.

How to use the map. The way you use your map will also depend on the topic of your REM session, and what the purpose of it was. Here are some things to consider:

- **Re-visit the map in a future meeting / group gathering:** to fill in any gaps, or to check accuracy or missing details.

- **Fill in the gaps with evidence:** if you are looking to map impact it might be appropriate to gather some evidence to support the points made. For example any attendance figures, quotes from specific people.

- **Use the map to demonstrate impact of activities in funding bids, community reporting, showcasing achievements etc** You could include a screenshot or photo of the map, and describe how you gathered the data in reporting to your funder and also in funding applications.

- **Re-visit the map in the future to see if the group has any other points to add to it.** Often when we look at the ripples emerging from activities or groups, they evolve over time. When you conduct the REM session, it captures the ripples that have emerged up to that point in time. As the weeks / months go on, other ripples might emerge.

5. About EDRC

The Energy Demand Research Centre (EDRC) undertakes research for an affordable and secure low energy future. Our interdisciplinary research programme identifies evidence-based energy demand reductions for a sustainable and more equitable future. We work closely with partners from policy, industry, civil society and academia.

Grant number

EP/Y010078/1

DOI

https://doi.org/10.48785/100/521

How the report should be referenced

Brown, L. and Pangbourne, K. 2026. *Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) facilitation guide for community groups.* Energy Demand Research Centre.

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