



# Where do you feel Transition should go next?

## Collecting and sharing your experiences

Transition Network Survey October - November 2017

### Survey Analysis

Transition Network is reviewing and developing a new strategic framework, including looking at our organisational purpose, in a rapidly changing global context. We are keen to get feedback from the movement, to have a conversation about what is happening for Transition groups, to understand better what's happening in the wider picture of Transition. From 11<sup>th</sup> October to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017 we sent a very short survey to Transition groups, Transition Hubs and some of the wider Transition movement.

#### What we heard

**We heard where Transitioners see the most energy and potential for positive change.** They described the importance of community engagement and facilitating community-led action. This is allied to the importance of awareness-raising, communication and stories. Also linked is the impact that comes from the ability of Transition groups to convene, or bring together diverse groups and build partnerships. Partnerships with municipalities or local government can be particularly effective.

Many expressed the potential of sharing learning, including internationally. Inner Transition, healthy groups, and community cohesion and wellbeing are all vital.

Practical projects are highly important, both to demonstrate new ideas and also as a way to encourage people to get involved. Within the practical projects there is a striking level of importance given to local food projects.

**We heard what Transitioners are currently finding most challenging.** Working in the context of a highly consumerist society focused on economic growth, is a problem. The scale of the challenge is daunting, and there are political barriers.

Overwhelmingly, most of the challenges expressed were around all levels of the need to engage people. A high proportion of respondents name the challenge of engagement with the wider community, when the wider community is busy or unwilling. There is also a high proportion naming the challenge of getting more volunteers for the core group of the Transition initiative.

The challenge of sustaining momentum is linked to the risks of burn-out, and dealing with group dynamics and conflict. There is a desire to engage with more diverse sectors of the population, to move beyond the white middle class. Some find communicating the Transition message to be a challenge. And there is a need for funding, or for Transition to provide livelihoods.

**There are many indications here of areas where support around the network could help Transition groups. There are also indications of ways that Transition could scale up its impact.**

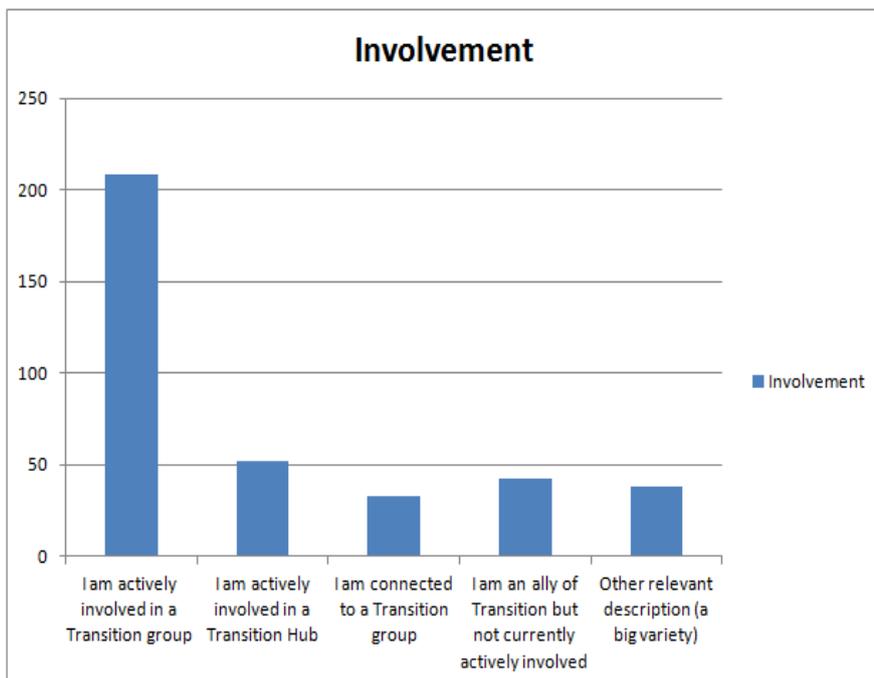
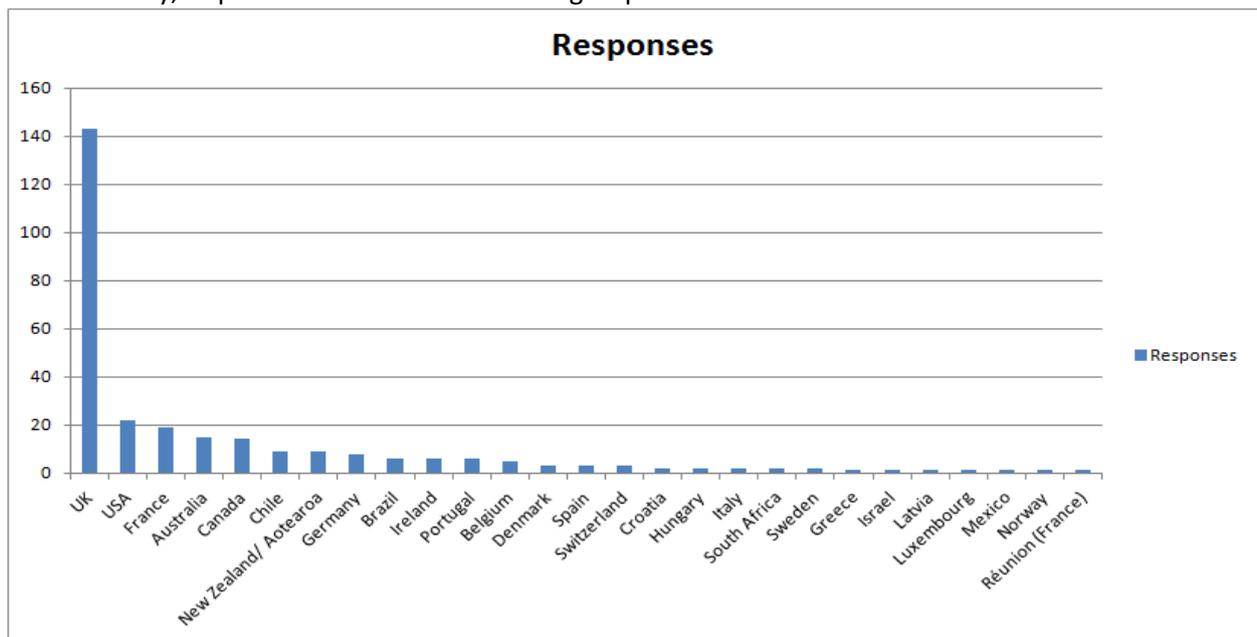
## Who responded to the survey?

At 30th November 2017, **288 people** had responded to the survey. This is a good response – the survey was initially sent to around 1,000 Primary Points of Contact for Transition groups and Transition Hub contacts. Later in October it was publicised on the Transition Network website and social media.

There were responses from **26 countries**. Half of the responses were from Transitioners in the UK. This reflects and makes visible that:

- Transition Network does not hold contact details for many of the Transition groups in countries supported by Transition Hubs.
- Transition Network’s contacts are better for English-speaking countries.
- The survey was in the English language, though some replies were in French or Spanish.

We suggested to Transition Hubs that they could answer the survey on behalf of Transition groups in their territory, or pass on the link to Transition groups.



We asked people to describe their involvement in the Transition movement. Approximately three quarters of people who responded are actively involved in a Transition group. The total number of responses is more than 288 because many people can tick more than one category.

Of the UK respondents, 78% said they were actively involved in a Transition group.

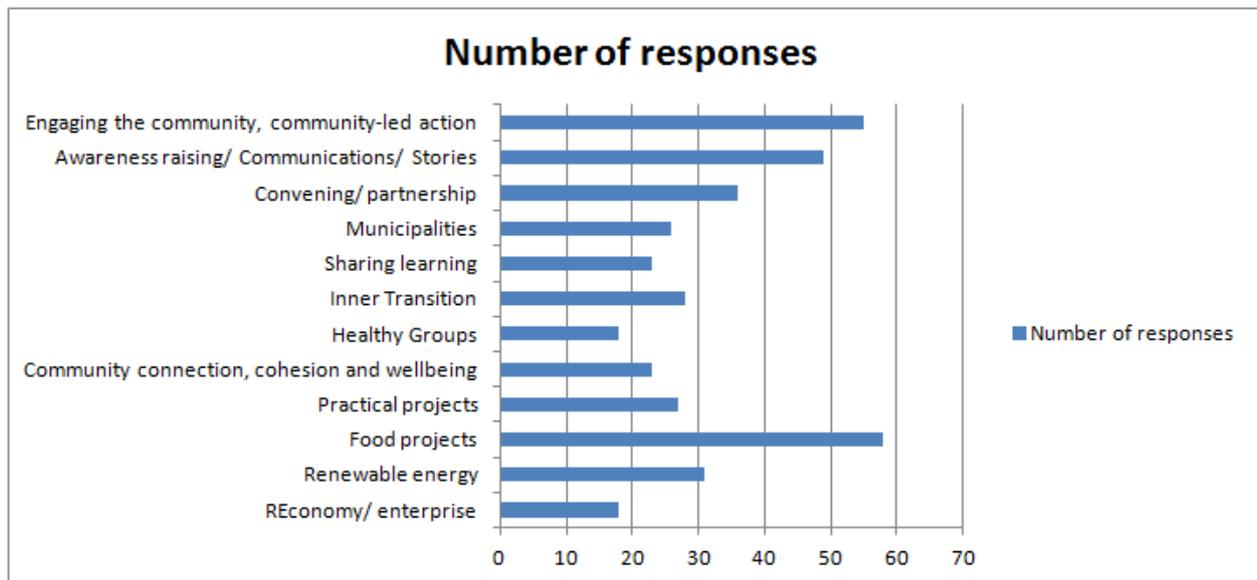
## The three questions we asked

The survey asked three questions:

- From your experience in the Transition movement, where do you see the most energy and potential for positive change?
- From your experience of the Transition movement, what are you currently finding most challenging and why?
- What are your key learnings from being involved in Transition?

## Where do you see the most energy and potential for positive change?

The top 12 themes where respondents see energy and potential for Transition:



### The importance of community engagement and facilitating community-led action:

B.H., UK:

Facilitating communities to come together and make changes.

C. M., Portugal:

I find that energy and potential for positive change is happening in the local communities. Once the movement is installed in the community it takes its own course, and different groups start to appear from different areas, creating more and more resilience. For this to happen we have to work hard on bringing the community together and developing strong ties with the local people.

H.S., Australia:

Involvement means feeling better about the future. If political idealism is set aside, as by and large it is in the movement, there will be involvement by more people. Tolerance, inclusiveness, finding a middle way and encouraging positive action from all directions will mean that there will one day be a better world.

**This is allied to the importance of awareness-raising, communications and stories:**

K., Luxembourg:

Inspiration for getting active, showing alternatives at community level, reframing of stories into a new paradigm.

I. B., Croatia:

I think of the Transition movement as a positive disease (get out the comfort zone, and take problems in your hands!) - so most energy and potential I see in spreading the movement and getting to more and more people.

I.M., Brazil:

In the stories! Only emotion teaches. The stories that show that it is possible, they thrill. When we see groups around the world changing their realities, having fun, and creating a strong sense of community, all we think is that we want to do the same.

**Also linked is the impact that comes from the ability of Transition groups to convene, or bring together diverse groups and build partnerships:**

G.P., Canada:

Every task we work on and every challenge we tackle, succeeds or fails because of the number of people in the community that we can call upon. Our greatest success in networking was in creating an annual festival that has grown quite large, and attracts groups, organisations and businesses from all corners of our community. Our greatest potential for success is because of all the connections we now have in our area.

G.J., UK:

We set up SuStAinable StAlbans Week in order to encourage wider participation from other groups and were met with an overwhelming enthusiasm (100+ groups running 100+ activities/events) from schools, faith groups, businesses and community groups.

**Partnerships with municipalities or local government can be particularly effective:**

A.H., Spain:

There's a lot of interest and perceived potential in working with the local administration. The cooperation of the local government can be crucial in achieving concrete results. This way, transition can not only access more resources and have public acceptance, but also begin to influence local budgets and involve more organisations in the change process.

D.D., New Zealand:

Several of us are working with a city council environmental advisory group, on climate change and building a connected city. The mayor is very open to this.

**Many expressed the potential of sharing learning, including internationally:**

C. S., USA:

After hosting a national gathering this past July it became even more obvious that "deepening" relationships through in-person gatherings is really an essential component of effective Transition work. Periodic deepening carries the work a long way. Two other things really seem to move the greater work along.

First: Easily replicable models (like Transition Streets, Repair Cafes, etc.) that groups can pick up and run with (or models that Transition National Hubs might easily repurpose for their countries then offer widely).

Second: Creating various connection points where the movement can connect with more of itself.

S. H., Sweden:

Local groups AND international communities of practice

S., Chile:

In the exchange of information and experiences, and the possibility of making contact with people involved in Transition, around the world.

K.B., UK:

The greatest potential is the large Transition network of Transition towns, which unfortunately feels a bit underused at the moment. It could be used for generating new ideas, exchanging experiences, providing support and tools from towns that have already been involved in a certain initiative, and also for getting funding.

**Inner Transition, Healthy Groups and Community cohesion and wellbeing, are all vital:**

I.K., Germany:

In supporting people's inner transition towards a personal, more sufficient life. If more and more people value healthy natural surroundings, relationships and experiences higher than consuming stuff, status symbols etc., the required cultural transition starts.

N., La Réunion:

People working from a positive place in their hearts (called love!) and reaching out to others unlike them, creating new connections and understanding between groups who may not have mixed before.

A., Israel:

From the knowledge of collaboration and group work and community governance methods.

**Practical projects are highly important, both to demonstrate new ideas and also as a way to encourage people to get involved.**

G.T., UK:

Active community projects that engage local people with the big issues.

M., Belgium

I see the huge potential that smallish but visible projects can have, especially projects taking place in the public space. Those projects (Incredible edible, gift box, etc) have multiple impacts: producing local food but also giving a sense of community, creating groups, helping people reclaim their public space, experiment in working together, and on top they have a huge awareness raising impact by showing how possible change is.

**Within the practical projects, there is a striking level of importance given to local food projects.**

G. J., UK:

Here in St Albans younger people have been keenly involved in Food Growing & Food Waste issues and healthy and vegan diets. In 2013 we helped to set up a community supported agriculture project FoodSmiles StAlbans which is now independent. They have also gone on to set up an Incredible Edible scheme. We ran a Food Waste Challenge and a Sustainable Food Day.

D. H., USA:

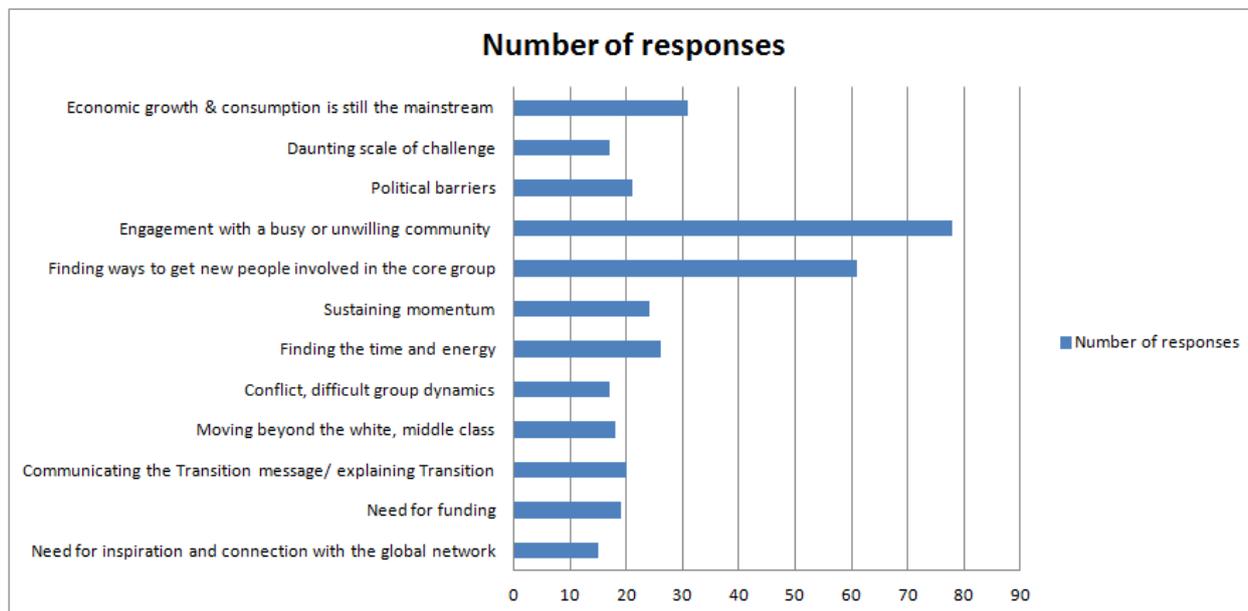
In small, highly-replicable projects that directly meet the current needs of their community. Transition Sarasota's Suncoast Gleaning Project has been so celebrated and successful because it serves a real, obvious need in our community (providing those who are "food insecure" with access to healthy, local produce)....

The themes of practical projects mentioned, included:

- Food projects
- Renewable energy
- REconomy, enterprise
- Building community spirit & connection
- Waste
- Transport
- Repair Cafes
- Education
- Permaculture
- Transition Streets
- Housing/ natural building
- Nature/ community gardens
- Reducing plastic use
- Re-skilling
- Energy efficiency
- Local currencies
- Health

## What are you currently finding most challenging and why?

### The top 12 themes of what respondents find challenging in Transition:



### **Working in the context of a highly consumerist society focused on economic growth, is a problem:**

B., Hungary:

How can we build a sustainable local society and structures in an unsustainable world? If we keep the rules of the current game, we cannot win, but how (fast or slowly) can we change the rules? Locally and/or globally...

R. O., UK:

Keeping the momentum of our group going in the context of a society which still thinks it OK to keep on building new roads, airports etc - and thinks the thought of living on Mars some day is perfectly reasonable!

L. C., Canada:

Some of the important work that grassroots groups have done in our community seems to be collapsing or is being destroyed because "economic growth" still seems to be the mainstream mantra.

C. B., Italy:

It is a challenge to finance activity with a real potential to change the system. Because the system is still strong and prevents everything that can really change its deep structure, denying access to money is a very effective way to achieve this.

G., Germany:

[Its the mental infrastructure](#), The old growth based thinking deeply implemented in action and thoughts of the majority. We first have to destruct and bury dangerous illusions before we can build new ones.

### **The scale of the challenge is daunting:**

G.T., UK:

The scale of the global issues and the smallness of our response.

J., Aotearoa:

It is difficult at times to promote change when I know it won't save us.

F.O., Belgium:

Global change seems sometimes slow...

### **and there are political barriers:**

P.J., UK:

There is no political leadership; ... We have made very detailed responses to our Local Plan and our Neighbourhood Plan giving positive, helpful "easy wins" and generally these are completely ignored because all that matters is the expensive 5 bedroom houses get built and the profits made. ... The local council do not respond to emails or letters, the MP will not engage with us, and it feels as if everything possible is being done to stop us making progress.

P.O., Chile:

Lo mas desafiante en este momento en Chile, es la transformación o Flexibilidad de los instrumentos legales de los municipios, Ministerios, Seremis, (Estructuras del Estado). Estamos elaborando actividades Eco alfabetización con la comunidad, a las actividades asisten personas que trabajan dentro de los Municipios, pero al momento en que la comunidad quiere elaborar proyectos de regeneración en espacios públicos, las legalidades son un gran desafío.

[The most challenging at this moment in Chile is the transformation or flexibility of the legal instruments of the municipalities, Ministries, Seremis, \(State Structures\). We are developing Eco literacy activities with the community, activities are attended by people who work within the Municipalities, but at the moment when the community wants to develop regeneration projects in public spaces, the legalities are a great challenge.](#)

**Overwhelmingly, most of the challenges expressed were around all levels of the need to engage people - whether in the core group, the community, more diverse sectors of the population and connection with the national and global network.**

**A high proportion of respondents name the challenge of engagement with the wider community, when the wider community is busy or unwilling:**

G. H., Canada:

Motivating & energising people; attracting them to events. This is often an issue of time - this is largely a bedroom community so people often have a long commute. People are often on board with the ideas and issues but don't have the energy or enthusiasm to actually show up or to change how they live.

J. V., UK:

The large population of retired people here don't connect with the working people who are so busy earning enough to keep a roof over their heads they have no time for other activities.

**There is also a high proportion naming the challenge of getting more volunteers for the core group of the Transition initiative:**

J. R., UK:

Engaging more people to share the load, especially as many key members have become involved in specific local projects which have developed a life of their own (which is as it should be) but it's hard to find replacements to take on new initiatives.

Anonymous, Belgium:

Extend our core team. It is difficult to find volunteers who are willing to engage themselves for a longer period.

**The challenge of sustaining momentum is linked to the risks of burn-out, and dealing with group dynamics and conflict:**

M.P., Brazil:

The most challenging issues are long term change, and commitment, and conflict inside groups. We work with change, and leave our comfort zone and this is hard to manage inside people's life.

T., Denmark:

Collaboration, conflict handling, how to make a living and not wear out the volunteers.

**There is a desire to engage with more diverse sectors of the population, to move beyond the white middle class:**

C.O., Chile:

Desbordar la configuración existente en las iniciativas de transición cuyos participantes son predominantemente de clase media acomodada.

[Overcome the existing configuration in transition initiatives whose participants are predominantly well-off middle class.](#)

L., UK:

How to reach out to a wider demographic to make transition relevant to people who are struggling with other challenges.

**Some find communicating the Transition message to be a challenge:**

A.C., Ireland:

Communicating the urgency of the sustainability message.

P. UK,

I rarely see anything about our transition group in the local newspaper, or even on social media.

P.B., France

Il y a de plus en plus de personnes en transition individuelle qui cherchent à agir collectivement et localement, mais elles ne connaissent pas notre existence et n'ont pas conscience de leur capacité à être acteur du changement collectif. Le plus difficile est de faire savoir que nous existons et de convaincre les personnes qu'elles peuvent agir.

[There are more and more individuals in individual transition who seek to act collectively and locally, but they do not know our existence and are not aware of their capacity to be activists of](#)

collective change. The most difficult thing is to let people know that we exist and to convince people that they can act.

**And there is a need for funding, or for Transition to provide livelihoods:**

J.H., UK:

Creating projects/processes that are self-sustaining. The Transition Town Movement needs business models that pay for themselves rather than relying on a few capable individuals working to burn out.

C. Australia:

Financial sustainability so that we can spend more time working for the transition.

**There are useful comments on the need for inspiration and connection with a national or global network:**

R. H., Australia:

For some reason we have been operating almost in a vacuum, without much support or connection from the international transition town movement.

M, UK:

I am perplexed by the lack of information about other groups. As each group is using a different means of social media, we are somehow bypassing each other. There must be a wealth of knowledge and skills out there we are missing. .... I'd be keen for a couple of short inspirational articles about what's happening around the network on a regular basis.

S.A., South Africa

The isolation. The committee we formed in Durban was fragmented and distracted and we had little clear guidance, with all of us being inexperienced in transition. ... I've never been able to afford training, but have worked through the books on my own or in small groups where there's interest. The global online network has really been a source of strength and solidarity for me, and I can also see that expanding to online gatherings which allow otherwise isolated groups to really connect with one another, experience and ideas flowing beyond geographies. I believe as communities in the global South are empowered to find their own transition, we'll see fascinating truths emerge which will in turn teach the whole world new ways of being.

## What are your key learnings from being involved in Transition?

There was the most variety and diversity amongst answers to this question... there was almost a different learning from each different person! Here is an attempt to show MOST of the main learnings reported from people's involvement in Transition, grouped by similar theme as much as possible:

- **Working together with other people is important**
- It's great to meet and work with new people
- Groups usually need one enthusiastic person to take the lead
- Few people have the ability to keep things moving, and engage the community, we need to support these people
- Small groups of motivated, friendly people can achieve a lot
  
- **Optimism, enjoyment, fun**
- Go where the energy is
- Positive vision
- Active hope
- The journey is its own reward
- Seize opportunities, embrace change, uncertainty and complexity
- Celebration is essential
  
- **Inner Transition**
- Strong relationships in groups
- The importance of creative meeting and event processes, facilitation skills
- Don't get involved in more than you can cope with, take burn-out seriously
- People need deep support for change
- Healing is part of the Transition process
- Build in clear interpersonal processes from the start, & non-violent communication
- We need inner transition and feminism to heal deep conflicts running through groups
- Working in groups is difficult and many people are not well equipped to do it
- Friction leads to growth
- Learn from indigenous communities, for example younger and elder groups
- Transition needs to ally more with personal-spiritual growth and human values
- Inner Transition can put people off
  
- **Community engagement is paramount**
- Highlight local issues, local needs
- Understand place and purpose
- Social development and community building work is challenging
- Communication to everyone
- It's harder to recruit volunteers
- The difficulty of engaging a wider audience
  
- **Use networks and partnerships**
- The power of working with local government
- Many people are doing Transition things without labelling it Transition
- Engaging with institutions is slow and difficult
- Bottom up and top down action need to come together
- Government policy crushed UK and Australian community renewable energy
- Need to form alliances with faith communities and trade unions

- **Patience, Transition needs time**
- Persistence
- Small contributions add up
- Need for energy and commitment
- Participation and energy ebb and flow
  
- **Change CAN happen at community level**
- Model change through examples, practical projects
- Get things done without bureaucratic hold ups
- Need to fill the gaps where media, politicians and municipalities aren't working
  
- **Increased personal knowledge** about:
  - climate change, resilience, environmental solutions
  - community
  - permaculture
  - economics and social questions
  
- **The worldwide network is important**
- Help offered by the network has made it easier
- Ideas from around the world have stimulated our creativity
- Need more information about the best ways to run groups and projects
- I feel disconnected from Transition Network
- The Transition movement is polycentric
  
- **Money and funding is a barrier**
- We need paid local and regional representatives and co-ordinators
- Need to make a living from Transition - but its difficult
- Need green businesses
  
- **Different perspectives of different people are important**
- Everyone should have a place in Transition
- The words Transition and resilience are a barrier to understanding
- Transition is challenging in a post-soviet country and society
- Sometimes there are class issues
- The movement is exclusive
  
- **There are limits to what a community-scale organisation can do**
- I'm sad that my local group has lost momentum
- Most people never learn or don't care
- I'm learning to try to exude an air of enthusiasm and positivity when a large part of me feels pessimistic about the future
  
- **Achieving even the beginning of systematic change is difficult**
- We need to decentralise and dismantle hierarchical and historical power structures
- Insist on radical change
- Experimentation
- Modern society is moving towards consumerism
- Need to focus on climate change
- Transition will be painful

## Conclusion

There were so many heartfelt and thoughtful contributions to this survey. I feel very grateful to everyone who responded and I am sorry I cannot quote everyone; but I have appreciated reading every response. All of the responses to the survey can be read here: <http://tiny.cc/19d7ny>.

There are many indications here of areas where support around the network could help Transition groups. For example, looking at common challenges and best practice around community engagement, communications, inner Transition, healthy groups and practical projects.

There is also the daunting scale of the challenge of working in the current system while trying to build a future based on human wellbeing and natural resource limits. There are indications of new ways Transition could step up to the challenges, for example by convening and bringing together different groups and partnerships, bringing more financial resources to Transition, working innovatively with municipalities, engaging with more diverse sectors of the population and using our international connectness better.

A [mid-survey report](#) compiled in early November 2017 helped inform Transition Network staff and trustees ahead of discussions on our renewed organisational purpose. These discussions continue in early 2018. Please see <https://transitionnetwork.org/news-and-blog/feel-transition-go-next/> for the direction of these discussions, and to share your views to help us shape and finalise Transition Network's organisational purpose and priorities by March 2018.

As an overall conclusion:

J. R., Spain:

What are my key learnings from being involved in Transition? That we are in historical moments where we need to experiment, be creative and build trust among us. That we alone can't do it, we need to support each other, learn from each other, and make mistakes together. That we need to be brave, sometimes it is not easy and we need to take time for ourselves. That by creating this huge network of people and projects around the world magical things are starting to happen, making me feel alive.

January 2018

Nicola Hillary, Funding Manager, Transition Network [nicolahillary@transitionnetwork.org](mailto:nicolahillary@transitionnetwork.org)