A Guide to Good Engagement with Residents

Co-produced by the Guide to Good Engagement Working Group, part of Adults and Communities People Bank

About Us

The Guide to Good Engagement Working Group came together as part of the Adults and Communities engagement structure.

Members have volunteered to be part of the group due to their experience and expertise with engagement.

Members experience includes engagement with:

- voluntary sector groups e.g. Barnet Elderly Asians Group
- local authorities e.g. Barnet Council
- Barnet Clinical Commissioning Group
- NHS
- special interest groups e.g. Residents' Associations.

The section on accessibility for people with learning disabilities was written with members of Barnet Mencap. All the members have a learning disability.

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Part 1: Key skills in engagement

Why engage with residents?

Delivering good engagement can often be a time consuming and resource intensive process.
This can stop organisations and individuals wanting to work with residents.

When engagement is delivered effectively it can have a number of benefits which can easily outweigh the inputs that are required.

The key benefits of good engagement are:

Improving outcomes:

- services are developed in a way that works for the people using them
- services have a better understanding of public expectations
- changes and decisions are evidenced using resident experience
- strong partnerships are built with residents.

Building partnerships:

- residents are happier with changes they are able to shape
- residents are more connected to the communities they live and work in
- residents become positive ambassadors for engaging communities
- relationships with residents who have previously made complaints can improve
- resident satisfaction can improve
- complaints can reduce.

Evidence for decision making

- residents provide evidence on why certain decisions are made
- residents can give insight into the impact of decisions that are made
- residents' input will provide more weight to reports and committee papers
- residents' input will provide evidence in cases of legal challenge.

Cost effectiveness

- designing services that meet the needs of those who use them provides good value for money
- engaging with residents early means key issues are identified at the start
- ensuring services do not need to be regularly changed, as they are appropriate for communities from the start
- engaging appropriately should reduce the risk of costly legal challenge in the future.

What does good engagement look like?

In order to develop positive experiences of engagement it is essential to understand what good engagement is. Poor engagement can be as damaging to the organisation's reputation as not undertaking any engagement at all.

Ensuring successful engagement relies on working closely with residents. This will build trust, ensure people feel valued and build confidence in the work we do.

In order to support this, good engagement should be:

Representative – The people you work with should reflect the diversity of the population affected by the decisions you make.

Honest – The areas of change need to be made clear. Areas that cannot be changed need to be clearly communicated and explained. Restrictions, for example budget constraints, need to be communicated from the start.

Meaningful – There needs to be a real opportunity in the project to make changes and influence an outcome. The people you engage with should be able to see the impact of the work they do when the project is complete.

Timely – Engagement should be planned into a project at the key milestones so that the work is relevant to the development of the project. Enough time should be given to ensure residents are able to fully understand the information and be able to respond effectively.

Accessible – Engagement opportunities should be set up to enable everyone with an interest to be involved in ways they choose.

Complete – Engagement needs to be completed by identifying and reporting back to those involved, the effects and changes their engagement has had. Without this, people can feel frustrated that their comments and time have not been used effectively.

The 4 steps to engaging

1. Design

During the planning of any project, engagement should be considered before any work on the project takes place.

To decide what you are engaging on, think about:

- what you want to know from the engagement
- what can be changed after the engagement
- what cannot be changed after the engagement.

To decide who are you engaging with, think about:

- who must you work with
- who will be affected by this
- who may be interested in this.

To decide the methods used in engagement, think about:

- the level of impact the subject will have
- the level of influence people will have
- the role and experience of the people with whom you engage
- any additional needs that people may have
- the pace of the work should be dictated by the residents and not the project; this can often take longer than is expected.

2. Plan

It is essential that you plan the details of your engagement activities. This is to ensure that you are able to keep track of the work you are doing.

Key dates:

- which dates cannot be changed?
- map out the dates that are not able to be moved first and plan the rest of your engagement work around this.

Communications:

- how will you let people know about the engagement activities you want to run?
- what are the best ways of reaching the different people who are identified in your design stage?
- how much will your communications cost?
- is additional time needed for large scale communications such as printing and posting?

Facilitators:

- With any face-to-face engagement, you need to identify who will be best placed to facilitate the work
- Often two people are best:
  - one person with skills in working with people and facilitation
  - one person with knowledge of the subject matter.

Practical issues:

- do you need to book a venue and if so is the venue large enough?
- does the venue have suitable toilets and access for disabled people?
- do you need to arrange refreshments?
- are you going to offer a financial incentive for people to engage?
- what do you need to be able to make the method of engagement successful? e.g. if sending out a survey, do you need pre-paid return envelopes?

What is needed to engage?

- appropriate and concise information to enable full understanding
- information written in plain English
- information about where events are being held and who to contact
- what is expected of people during engagement.

3. Deliver

If you have followed through with the design and planning, delivery of your intended engagement activities should be a clear process.

Some key points to remember during delivery are:

- remind people close to the time of the engagement activities, what is happening and of any deadlines that are coming up
- send out anything people will need to read in advance of meetings and bring copies to the event
- ensure that for face-to-face sessions, you have everything you need in advance of the session
- if engagement activities are taking place over a long period of time, get feedback at each stage and make amendments to the plan as necessary
- ensure all information is captured from the different engagement methods you are using.

4. Report

The engagement process is only complete when a report is made for those involved. The function of the report is to show three things:

- residents' input was valued

- residents' input was used effectively

- the work done was based on residents' input.

Key areas to consider when reporting are:

- show how input was used, e.g. in reports to committees

- thank people immediately after the engagement activity, for their participation and advise what the next steps will be

- provide updates when any key pieces of work happen, e.g. committee reports or key decision making

- be transparent with participants and feedback on all aspects of engagement, even if these are not being taken further

- advise people on how to engage further with the organisation if they wish to.

Part 2: How to make engagement accessible
General accessibility guidelines

Before engaging with residents, it is important to make sure the work you do is accessible to as many people as possible.

To make **written engagement** successful, you need to consider:

Language:

- keeping documents jargon free
- keeping documents free from subject specific terms
- providing a glossary of terms for difficult or unusual words
- writing acronyms out in full
- keeping information concise.

Font:

- Barnet Council style guide recommends using Arial 12 for all corporate documents
- Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) recommends that large print should be 16 or 18 point and that anything over this is described as giant print
- this document is written in Century Gothic 14, which is the preferred size for people with learning disabilities.

General:

- providing contact details so residents can request written information in different formats
- allowing the appropriate amount of time for documents to be printed, posted and received
- sending documents at least 1 week in advance of an event to ensure they are read
- allowing the appropriate amount of time for people to read, understand and write a response
- allowing enough time for responses to be received back
- including a summary or contents page if documents are more than 4 pages long

To make **face-to-face** engagement successful you need to consider:

Acoustics:

- can speakers be heard clearly?
- do you need to use audio equipment so everyone in the room can hear clearly?
- minimising background noise wherever possible.

Lighting:

- it is bright enough that text can be easily read?
- if using a projector, that screens are positioned where any changes in light will not affect them.

Vision:

- that nobody is sitting where their vision of any presenters or presentations is affected
- People's positions around tables in relation to speakers
- if there is room for people to turn when presentations are taking place.

Temperature:

- whether the temperature is adjustable.

Furniture:

- whether furniture can easily be moved to provide the most suitable room setup
- whether there is space to move around safely and with ease
- whether there is somewhere to put coats and bags to avoid tripping.

Food:

- whether you need or want to provide refreshments or food
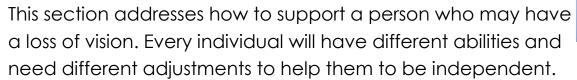- asking for people's dietary needs
- clear labelling of food.

Agenda:

- if people need to move around the room is there enough room to do this safely?
- Will people be able to move easily if using communication support?
- does the set up of the day allow everyone access to all parts of the agenda?

General

- can people enter and leave the room easily?
- are the toilets accessible?
- are all areas well signposted?
- allowing time for breaks, but also be honest about how long things take.

Visual Accessibility

This section addresses how to support a person who may have a loss of vision. Every individual will have different abilities and need different adjustments to help them to be independent.

The best way to ensure engagement is accessible, is to ask the person what will help them most.

To make **written engagement** successful you need to consider:

Printing

- asking the person what size font will be best for them
- asking the person if they would prefer printing on A4 or A3
- providing contact details where people can request braille or audio translations
- ensuring that there is a clear contrast between the background colour and the colour of text
- that some people may request a dark background with light writing
- keeping writing well spaced to help people to read.

General

- hyperlinks in documents need to be descriptive of what they link to. People using technology to read documents are then able to identify the correct link
- providing copies of documents in advance so people have time to read them
- providing copies of any slides being used in advance, as people may not be able to see them on the day.

To make **face-to-face engagement** successful you need to consider:

Support:

- whether people need to be met and guided
- introducing yourself; ask how the person would like to be guided and determine what level of physical contact is needed
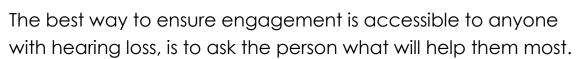- explaining approaching obstacles that may not be seen.

Animal assistants:

- that animal assistants cannot be separated from their owner
- that if the animal is wearing an identity harness, they should not be petted
- that water may need to be provided for the animal.

General:

- some people with visual impairment don't look directly at people
- asking the person if they will be bringing any equipment and will they need to be seated nearer a plug point.

Hearing Accessibility

The best way to ensure engagement is accessible to anyone with hearing loss, is to ask the person what will help them most.

Each person with hearing loss has a right to define themselves how they wish, however there are broad categories of definitions:

- **Deaf**: note the capital D. It denotes those who are culturally deaf, who use sign language as their first or preferred language
- **deaf**: note the lower-case d. It denotes most other types of hearing loss, from profound to mild loss. deaf people will usually have developed speech and may prefer to speak and to read lips
- **hard-of-hearing**: usually a hearing loss due to age, but can be from any age. Usually describes a mild to moderate loss
- **deafened**: usually someone who has developed speech, but has acquired a severe to profound hearing loss as an adult.

To make **written engagement** successful you need to consider :

Language

- British Sign Language (BSL) is not the same as spoken English. Someone who knows BSL will not necessarily know English

- whenever writing to someone when BSL is their first language, keep sentences simple.

To make **face-to-face engagement** successful you need to consider :

Environment

- if there is good lighting
- keeping background to a minimum
- speakers standing where their faces can be seen clearly. This is particularly important for lipreading.

Translation

- Speech to Text Reporters (STTRs), who translate the spoken word into text using technology
- British Sign Language interpreters, who translate the spoken word into signs
- that public events without the need to book, will need to provide both types of translation
- If there are enough interpreters ensure they do not need to interpret for longer than 60-90 minutes
- whether hearing loops are provided or needed. Many modern hearing aids are not compatible with them and hearing loops are being superseded by other types of technology.

Communication

- the 4 steps to communicating well with someone with a hearing loss:
  - get the person's attention first
  - repeat what you have said only once
  - rephrase what you have said
  - write down what you want to say
- your body language and facial expressions when communicating and keep your face relaxed and neutral.
- slowing down speech and don't talk too fast
- don't cover your mouth or eat when talking.

Animal assistants:

- that animal assistants cannot be separated from their owner
- that if the animal is wearing an identity harness, they should not be petted
- that water may need to be provided for the animal.

Physical accessibility

This covers permanent and temporary difficulties which people may face including, mobility , speech and neurological conditions.

The best way to ensure engagement is accessible to anyone with physical needs is to ask the person what will help them most.

To make **face-to-face engagement** successful you need to consider:

Environment:

- hidden disabilities that may impact on people's physical abilities, e.g. a heart condition that may restrict the amount someone can walk.
- whether people are able to transfer from wheelchairs into alternative seating if this is required
- ensuring there is somewhere safe to store mobility aids that is near the person but will not cause an obstruction to others
- ensuring there is enough space to accommodate wheelchairs around the table
- ensuring the toilets are accessible to everyone who may need them.

Support:

- providing note takers for discussions to enable people to concentrate on participation
- providing communication cards to enable people to be involved
- asking people if they would like to bring someone to support them.

Agenda:

- whether there is enough time for people using communication aids to be able to say what they wish to
- if anyone needs specialist equipment
- planning meetings outside peak travel time allows ease of travel.

Accessibility for people with a learning disability

People with a learning disability do not always see themselves as having a disability but an impairment. People with learning disabilities want to be as independent as possible.

To make **written engagement** successful you may need to consider:

Using an Easy Read format document:

- Easy Read is a specialist type of document that uses simple sentences and pictures to aid understanding

- there are lots of guides on how to write easy read documents

- there are companies that can translate complex documents into Easy Read for you.

Using an easier to read font:

- people with a learning disability in Barnet have told us they like Century Gothic in 14 point

- people with learning disabilities in Barnet do not like the question mark in this font. Question marks can be changed to the Calibri Light font.

- only send information that is relevant to what you are asking people to do

- people with learning disabilities may need more time than usual to be able to understand information and be able to respond

- using pictures to aid understanding wherever possible.

To make **face-to-face engagement** successful you may need to consider:

- making support available for people to help them understand what is being said and ensure their voice is being heard

- having smaller groups so people feel more confident in speaking up

- ensuring your agenda is not rushed as people may need more time to be able to process information

- ensuring at least two people with learning disabilities are sat together at tables so that they are able to support each other

- using slides for a presentation with fewer words and more pictures to help people understand

- allowing plenty of time when changing slides so people have time to read them

- providing note takers and/or facilitators so people do not have to make notes as well

- using communication cards on the tables so that people are able to show when they want to speak and to say if they don't understand

- when using communication cards it is important that everyone uses the cards, whether they have a learning disability or not, to be as inclusive as possible

- asking everyone to wear name badges

- having regular breaks and don't make meetings too long

- telling people what impact they have made in a format that is easy for them to understand.

Resources

The following websites provide more information on the subject areas within this guide

JDA - is dedicated to supporting everyone who is deaf or hard of hearing, people of all faiths and none, at all stages of life.

Action on Hearing Loss - are working towards a world where hearing loss doesn't limit or label people and where tinnitus is silenced.

Royal National Institute for the Blind - raise awareness of sight problems, how to prevent sight loss, and they campaign for better services and a more inclusive society.

Thomas Pocklington Trust - are committed to increasing awareness and understanding of the needs of people with sight loss, as well as developing and implementing services which meet their needs and improves lives.

Mencap - is the leading voice of learning disability. They support people with a learning disability and their families and carers.

Barnet Mencap - provides advice, information and support for people with learning disabilities,autism or Asperger's and their family carers.

Radar - A radar key is a large, conspicuous, silver-coloured key that opens more than 9,000 accessible toilets in the UK.

Changing Places - standard accessible toilets do not meet the needs of all people with a disability.
People with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis often need extra equipment and space to allow them to use the toilets safely and comfortably. These needs are met by Changing Places toilets.

Scope - is a charity that works towards making the UK a place where disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else.

The Disabilities Trust - is a leading national charity, providing innovative care, rehabilitation and support solutions for people with profound physical impairments, acquired brain injury and learning disabilities.