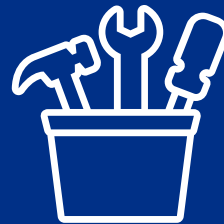




Asset-based Community Engagement Toolkit

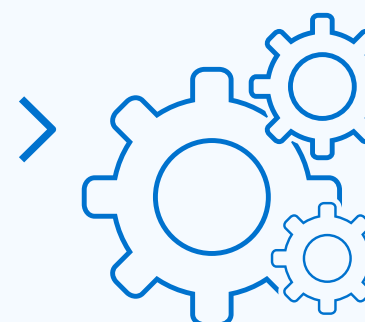


Produced by Leeds Voices to support meaningful engagement with communities



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Foreword

Welcome to our toolkit.

In this toolkit we will give you all the tools needed to run community engagements and gather the thoughts, opinions and insights of community members.

We believe that the best people to gather the views and experiences of communities most affected by health inequalities are locally trusted, grass-roots groups and organisations who have knowledge and long-term experience of working with and supporting these communities.

This toolkit is aimed at organisations with a range of engagement experience. You are welcome to use any parts that might be useful to you.

Along with models, tips and case studies, we've inserted links throughout the document to help with any paperwork, from volunteer role descriptions to note-taking templates, so you can download them and tailor them to your organisation.



This toolkit recognises the assets that already exist within communities and community organisations.

From this starting point it offers a basic methodology to collect views and insights, and present them in a way in which recommendations can be made and acted upon.

Leeds Voices



Finding the voice of those with the worst health outcomes

Why is there a need for this toolkit?



If we are serious about eliminating health inequalities, asking specific communities for feedback is crucial, especially where trust of services has been traditionally low and communities feel that they are not listened to.

For a recent engagement about Stroke Services our online survey received:

29 responses.

27 respondents were White British.

But we know that....

"Black communities are twice as likely to die of a stroke"

(Stroke Association 2019)

"South Asian people have strokes at a significantly younger age than white people and have a higher risk"

(Stroke Association 2019)

We believe that communities over-represented in health inequalities should be over-represented in engagements about health services.

This is our guiding principle. It is easy to get numbers on pages but true representation is what we, as community led organisations, should always strive to deliver.

What is Asset-based Engagement?

Assets: a useful or valuable thing or person

You have assets all around you. As a community organisation you are in the best place to host engagements, you know your community best and have the trust of communities.



Take time to consider...

What are the assets you have around you?

Assets fall into different categories.

They could be:

- Individuals, people known to your organisation
- Groups you host or you know in the local area
- Your organisation's partners, other organisations and local businesses
- Buildings and spaces around you
- Cultural heritage and history of communities

...and all the interwoven connections that happen in communities, which are impossible to map or document.



All of these assets form the foundations for good community engagement, so take some time to think how this can apply to your organisation and what assets you have to deliver engagements



Consider Intersectionality

“Many forms of oppression like racism, sexism and ageism might be present and active at the same time in a person’s life”. Definition by Peter Hopkins - Newcastle University

Also think about lived experiences within communities.

- *Different generations
- *Women and men
- *English as a second language
- *People with disabilities
- *LGBTQ+
- *Refugees
- *Carers
- *Care receivers
- *Digitally excluded
- *Financially excluded



Experiences of prejudice compound to be greater and different when suffered together.

Therefore as practitioners we should consider the wide ranges of experiences within communities.

It's not about capturing the voice of everyone, but recognising the groups you have spoken to and whether they are representative of the issue at hand.

So, if for example you mainly work with older Pakistani men, their views and experiences are going to be very different from their granddaughters'.

Depending on the subject, consider whether you need to seek the views of other parts of the community.

"Within LGBT+ communities we must consider older people, people from ethnic minorities, people who are digitally excluded"
-Focus group participant



[This](#) short video is created by Newcastle University. It describes simply what intersectionality is .

Safeguarding




Asking people about their experiences can often mean recounting bad experiences. We must always remember we are asking people to share sometimes very personal insights.

You should be aware of helplines and organisations that you can signpost people to who may have been affected by the discussion.

As a community organisation you will be in a good place to offer support, either from your own services or those of partner organisations.

Remember to brief all staff and volunteers about signposting information. Make sure that the lead facilitator is confident to stop the discussion if it is becoming too emotional for participants.



Guidance on Safeguarding for Volunteers policies can be found [here](#)

[Guidance on Risk Assessment templates can be found here](#)

And [here](#) is a toolkit from Research In Action about Trauma Informed Practice (Wilkinson 2018)

Lots of other safeguarding considerations are addressed in the links above 

Example: Managing potential triggers during focus groups settings

A recent engagement on mental health services in Leeds brought up memories and issues for participants in focus groups with a risk for people to then revisiting their previous traumas.

“

It was during a men's group who have been meeting regularly over a period of time. Some things about people's mental health was shared and one of the participants had become very upset remembering his experiences.

During the group we allowed the member to talk about his experiences. After the event the facilitator spoke to the group organiser who said that they would continue to talk about these issues to support the individual.

”

Case study

Circles of Life

Women Together (COLWT)



Protecting people to enable them to speak their truth and have a positive focus group experience where they have their voices heard, as well as safeguard any negative fall out from the experiences, is an issue that Circles of Life Women Together are very experienced at managing. Here COLWT describes, as a grassroots organisation, how they support people to tackle difficult subjects effectively.

Circles of Life Women Together (COLWT) aims to improve the lives of women and girls across Leeds. We work with women to develop skills and qualifications, increase motivation and participation, lifelong learning and create a positive attitude to learning for the benefit of the whole family.

Using Volunteers

COLWT has a pool of very experienced volunteers with skills and expertise in various areas including welfare benefits, advocacy relating to family law, employment, immigration, safeguarding, interpreting, counselling and health and wellbeing.

Gaining Trust

COLWT has gained the trust and confidence working at a grassroots level by delivering numerous awareness / talk therapy workshops within the diverse communities.

Partnership working

Leeds Voices had identified COLWT as being a proactive partner agency who have managed to reach those termed "Hard To Reach Communities". This was an ideal opportunity for both organisations to work in partnership in delivering focus groups such as Stroke Rehabilitation / Maternity / Health and Wellbeing. The outcome being a trusted conduit between partner agencies and the community

COLWT service users were forthcoming, highlighting their concerns, misconceptions and fears. Additional welfare issues can also be raised through these workshops allowing vulnerable individuals to be signposted to the relevant agencies for help and support..

Safeguarding -
supporting
people
revisiting
trauma

"COLWT has gained the trust and confidence working at a grass roots level by delivering numerous awareness / talk therapy workshops within the diverse communities in Leeds"

[You can read more about COLWT and their work here](#)

Interview

Black Health Initiative



We spoke to Bridget Robinson from BHI about engagement fatigue, why surveys don't often work, and some of the methods that BHI use to bring community voice to the front of decisions about services.

As we have already shared in this toolkit, surveys often don't get a good representation from diverse groups. "A lot of times black people in the UK don't get involved in surveys, a lot of people would rather meet to have the conversations", says Bridget, Operations manager at BHI.

Asked about what can be done about this, Bridget describes the many times she has sat and filled out surveys for service users. "People would prefer it on paper" she says, "especially the older generation".

But the reason for low take-up is deeper-rooted, as she goes on to describe. "You are less likely to make that extra effort if historically your voice was not listened to. People think there is no point, because nothing is going to happen."

So feedback is key to communities feeling listened to, but also action is crucial too. "If you were saying something 10 years ago, and the same problems keep happening eventually you will give up" Bridget says.

Bridget describes this as 'consultation fatigue' and even 'consultation theft'. "People are tired of it. No one is held to account for what's done with the info".

So communities need to see change in order to keep being involved, but what does good engagement look like?

Black Health Initiative have been carrying out engagements at the heart of the community and producing reports for many years, explains Bridget. "It's important that engagements are funded at a community level because the service users are there already."

"The top line is that they trust us, that's what brings people to focus groups. You have to remember that there are a lot of organisations, including BHI, out there doing engagement and doing it well", says Bridget.

"We have had hosted commissioners and written reports, and done it our own way". She goes on, "sometimes it's about flexibility of the commissioners to accept reports in different formats from different communities."

That's the challenge, comments Bridget, "do we have to learn their language to be heard or do we insist that commissioners understand the communities they serve and how they speak?"



"Do we have to learn their language to be heard or do we insist that commissioners understand the communities they serve and how they speak?"

[You can read more about BHI and reports on their website here](#)

Building on Knowledge

"We told you this last time and nothing was done about it"



Engagement should start with what we already know. It can be a good starter conversation too.

Show people data we already know (especially about that community). Then, importantly, outline the issues that the group have already raised.



Feedback Loop



"I'm just a little bit frustrated because these problems keep reoccurring, we were talking about them last year, we're talking about them now and we'll probably be talking about them next year. So where do we go from here?"
Focus Group Participant

"Because people do not get feedback, the trust is not there"
Focus Group Participant

Change usually happens over a long time. Don't wait to feed back to communities. A summary of 'what we heard' and recommendations can be shared in the short term.

As a community organisation you wear many hats. Advocating the voice of community should also include feeding back to groups what was heard. Set a date at the beginning of an engagement as a fixed feedback event.

Also consider how you will bring in decision makers to feed back. Sometimes it's also important for commissioners to tell communities what can't happen and why.

Volunteers

In order to deliver engagements you might need to recruit more volunteers, here is what we have learnt over the years to help with quick and effective mobilisation

One of our biggest assets are volunteers. They bring a wide range of skills and experience. Click on the links below for templates and examples of documents you might use:



Think about the people you'd like to be volunteers; where will you find them?

- [Volunteer Centre](#)
- Online - [Be Collective](#), recruitment websites (eg Indeed)
- Libraries
- One-Stop Centres
- Volunteer Fairs
- University Events

- [Role description](#)
- [Application form](#)

Send out your interview questions beforehand to help volunteers prepare. Make this an informal chat to get the best out of the volunteer. Establish volunteer skill sets.

- [Interview invite](#)
- [Interview questions](#)
- [Reference request letter](#)
- [Reference request pro-forma](#)

Make this as interactive as possible, encourage engagement so the volunteers speak out. Use scenarios to help volunteers understand what the role is.

- [Invite to Induction](#)
- [Induction Checklist](#)
- [Induction Attendance Form](#)
- [Induction Presentation](#)



Ask / suggest how often the support contact will be, agree this with the volunteer. Let them know you are always there to support them.

- [Weekly contact](#)
- [Regular Evaluation surveys](#)

Think about training for volunteers, what is mandatory (Eg safeguarding / Data Protection). What development opportunities are available? Can they access other training to help improve their volunteer experience?

- [Mandatory](#)
- [Voluntary](#)
- [Development](#)

Lots of support and encouragement, and constructive feedback. Listen to your volunteers!

- [Supervision template](#)
- [Exit Evaluation](#)

Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment:
Advertise widely
for best results.

Interview:
Share interview
questions for the
best responses.

Support:
Listen! Offer lots of support
and encourage
constructive feedback.

Volunteers have different
motivations for volunteering -
meeting people, career
progression, life experience -
all are valid reasons.

Induction:
Use lots of scenarios, let
the volunteers do the
talking.

Welcoming, encouraging and
positive response to initial
contact is vital. Redirect
people to other opportunities
if you can't place them.

Volunteers are valued members of
your team. Treat them well, giving
them the support and respect they
deserve and they will reward you by
offering you much of their time.

Volunteers are giving
their time for free, never
take that for granted.



Preparing to Run A Focus Group

Information about the topic, and support	✓
Consent & confidentiality agreements	✓
Note-taking template	✓
Equality monitoring form	✓
Questions with graphics	✓
Flipcharts, post it notes, marker pens	✓
Gift vouchers / food / snacks / thank you	✓



Click on the hyperlinks to see example documents

Who should ask the questions? Consider that some community members might not want to share personal experiences with peers.

Tell the group when they will hear back about the findings. You could collect contact details of those who want feedback.

Consider gender sensitivity, especially around sensitive subjects.

Ask before about accessibility needs: interpreters / physical / visual / hearing.

Leeds Voices pays people £10 voucher for focus group participation. You might decide not to do this, but how will you show appreciation?

Using established groups for focus groups can be more accessible for some people.

Top tips from the LV team



Allow for time to go 'off topic'. People will want to recount a story - it's important to listen and respect them.

People will see you as an expert in the subject you are asking about (that may be quite medical), have leaflets and contact numbers to give out.

Don't worry if you only have a few people. Small group numbers can often lead to richer conversations.

For more than ten people at a focus group, divide into groups to allow quality conversation and everyone to get to have a say.

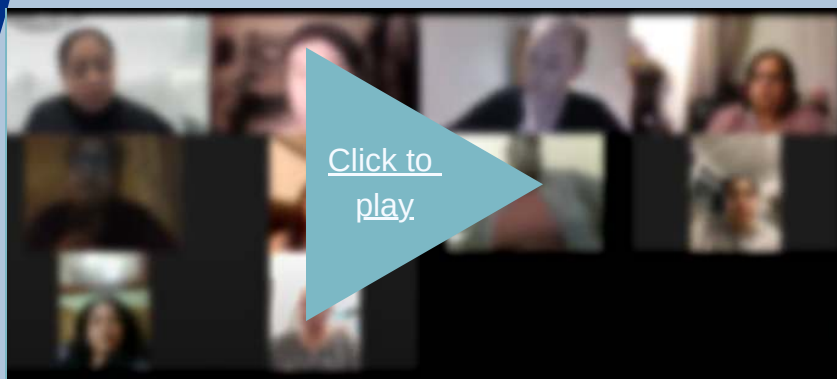
Draw people in with a wider context, health information or case studies particularly about their community and what we already know.

Make discussions a maximum of 1 hour. Any longer and you will begin to lose people's focus.

Over the next few pages we will take you step by step through a focus group and how you would capture the points raised and present points as recommendations for future action.

Running A Focus Group

Note taking



Click to watch this 3 minute video from a recent focus group we ran. Charlotte, one of our Leeds Health Ambassador volunteers, made the notes you can see below.

Top Tip:

A lot of time can be spent talking about other experiences, it's OK, allow people time to talk and gently re-ask the question. Listen out for those 'golden nuggets'!



Quote or key point in this format

Text summary (contextualising theme)	Quote(s) (if available)
Who would you want to be asking you questions?	
There were mixed opinions among the group regarding who would be most suited to engage with their communities. One member indicated that they would prefer to engage with a stranger, someone outside of their community (Quote 23) (Quote 24) (Quote 25).	'I would rather speak to someone who doesn't know me ... Without inhibition of other people knowing my [business]'. (Quote 23) ' <u>not</u> from my community'. (Quote 24) 'In our community things travel very fast'. (Quote 25)
Further members of the group agreed that they feel their community would prefer to engage with a member of their community that they trust (Quote 26).	'Someone you trust in the community, that can relay that back' 'listened to' 'take you seriously'. (Quote 26)
Conversations took place regarding the CCG involvement (Quote 27) (Quote 28).	' <u>higher</u> people in that higher power need to step down'. (Quote 27) ' <u>grass</u> root level and work with grass root organisations like us'. (Quote 28)
When asked specifically regarding their views on how important finding out what happened with things said within the engagement there was group consensus that feedback was important.	

You can find our template for focus group notes [here](#).

As you can see, not all comments are written down, it's impossible, especially when the group is not recorded. Do your best to capture key themes and differences of opinion.



Running A Focus Group cont.

We use this table to summarise the main themes from a Focus group...



Top Tip:

If a group agrees to you recording a session, let them know how the recording will be used and when it will be deleted.

Don't rely on technology - still make notes just in case!



Theme	Text summary (contextualising theme)	Quote(s) (if available)
Choice over who facilitates discussions	Participants had mixed thoughts on who they wanted to facilitate discussions, with some wanting to speak to members of their own community while others were reluctant as they didn't want their personal issues to spread. Therefore, a clear choice should be provided for communities on who facilitates their discussions.	<p>"I would rather speak to someone who doesn't know me Without inhibition of other people knowing my [business]"</p> <p>"Someone you trust in the community, that can relay that back...listened to...take you seriously"</p>

We then use these themes to draw down recommendations



Themes occur when similar discussions happen in other groups. On other occasions opinions can be very different between focus groups. Make sure this is also reflected in findings and recommendations.

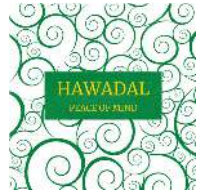
Theme	Recommendation
Flexibility around who facilitates groups	Most people wanted to speak to someone from their community that they trust. But importantly, some participants felt they would rather share experiences with someone they didn't know, for reasons of privacy. Where possible offer a chose of facilitators.

[You can read our full report here](#)



When the group is finished, take time soon after to fully write up notes. If you leave it too long you will forget important details.

Thank you to all the organisations and volunteers who contributed to Leeds Voices final evaluation and who supported the creation of this toolkit.



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December 2021

This toolkit is dedicated to the memory of Bridget Robinson.
May she rest in peace and continue to inspire us.

