Fife Centre for Equalities

Working with partners and communities to make Fife a fair, equal and inclusive place to live, work and study.

Engaging with **EASY TO IGNORE** communities

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About Fife Centre for Equalities

Fife Centre for Equalities (FCE), funded by Fife Council, started in 2014 with the vision to inspire and enable everyone we work with to take action that makes Fife a more equal, fairer place to live, work and study. FCE's mission is to develop a harmonised approach to build a collective voice to champion equality, diversity, inclusion and social justice. Our values are to work with honesty, integrity, respect and transparency, and strive to demonstrate a fully inclusive approach in everything we do. We want everyone we work with to share these values in the belief that they will help make Fife a fairer and more equal place.

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Background

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is a law provides an impetus to create a change in how organisations and communities experience engagement, participation and empowerment. Traditionally the standard approach has been to provide information and consult on plans that have already been developed.

With Equality and community engagement now central to core policy developments and frameworks that guide current public sector reform, (i.e. Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services; Community Empowerment Act 2015; Fairer Scotland; Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) Commission on Strengthening Local Democracy), it has become ever more important for Community Planners to bring together partners and agencies such as public organisations, third sector and communities to work together to plan and deliver better services to make a real difference to people's lives.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 is a law that helps people do that by making community groups and individuals voices stronger by asking public bodies to make sure they listen to what communities want.

The Act has a specific focus on promoting effective engagement and participation to help communities achieve greater control and influence in the decisions and circumstances that affect their lives.

The Act also has an emphasis on addressing disadvantage and inequality. It recognises that some groups are less likely to be engaged in any of engagement activity because various factors i.e. ethnic or language minorities, disabled people, young people, the elderly, people with low literacy levels, people on low incomes.

To read more about the act visit https://www.gov.scot/policies/community-empowerment/

Note

2010 Equality Act

There is no explicit legal requirement for local authorities to engage with all communities but the general equality duty requires public authorities to have an adequate evidence base for their decision-making. By not taking steps to reaching "easy to ignore" groups you could be accused of indirect discrimination. For more on the 2010 Equality Act https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance

Fife Community Planning Partnership

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act also formalises Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), now requiring that they exist in every Scottish local authority and that they plan and deliver local outcomes and engage and involve communities at all stages.

In Fife the community planning partnership or the Fife Partnership have developed a plan for Fife which aims to bring together local public service providers and communities to improve the quality of life for people who live in, work in or visit Fife.

By 2027 the partnership aims to achieve a Fairer Fife through the development of services and approaches which:

- Encourage people to take responsibility and make a difference
- Build self-belief and confidence in people and communities
- Promote organisational cultures that are facilitating and enabling
- Integrate provision and work with communities to get the design right
- Devolve decision making and strengthen accountability locally l focus on prevention, anticipation and collaboration in our use of public resources https://our.fife.scot/plan4fife/

There is recognition that many groups and organisations are already making a real difference in communities across Fife. The partnership wants to encourage others to get involved and make it easy for people to work together make a difference in Fife. However, there is recognition that work needs to be done to engage with those groups and individuals that are **EASY TO IGNORE** because of the complexity of their situation

About this guide

This guide has been developed by Fife Centre for Equalities to provide practical guidance for planners, commissioners, service providers and other relevant stakeholders to engage with groups that are 'easy to ignore'.

Our aim is that we

- Increase your understanding of Community Engagement
- Offer an insight into the barriers that **EASY TO IGNORE** individuals and groups face and offer techniques to reduce those barriers
- Learn how to develop a structure to plan any inclusive community engagement activity
- Develop confidence to engage with "easy to ignore communities"

Note: This guide uses the National Standards for Community Engagement alongside the "What Works Scotland" recommendations where groups are considered not ‘hard to reach’ they are ‘easy to ignore’ because of the complexity of their situation and FCE believes if we change our approach and methods, our engagement with any group will improve.

Part 1. Who are easy to ignore?

Traditionally a group within society that are typically under-represented in the planning process or have limited capacity for involvement are ‘easy to ignore’.

These can include people with protected characteristics and other factors. They may include minority ethnic people, disabled people, young people, the elderly, people with low literacy levels, older people, the homeless, those living in areas of high deprivation and people who simply do not think their participation will make a difference, people with caring responsibilities and others with complex living situations.

We used to consider communities only in relation geographical boundaries, but we need to move beyond that to also need to recognise that other communities exist and more needs to be done to engage with communities of identity (e.g., LGBTI+ groups) and communities of interest (such as women’s groups).

We also need to understand the methods we use to engage people that needs to change, and we need to move away from a one size fit’s all approach and that to engage people from all parts of society requires a variety of solutions as we develop the craft of inclusive engagement that requires the need for a flexible repertoire of skills and techniques

For further reading
http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/WWSHardToReachOrEasyToIgnoreEvidenceReview.pdf

One key point to note is your approach and the environment you create. If you are relaxed friendly, welcome people, become that familiar person and have clear boundaries and ways that you expect people to treat each other, you can create a more inclusive shared space.

COVID -19

The impact COVID-19 has had on engagement activity means that many have adopted a digital-first community engagement approach. This has opened opportunities for some people and created new barriers for others. This makes it even more important to understand all the barriers people

can face and not just because of where they live or who they are. The restrictions imposed on society because of the pandemic has highlighted that your environment can also create barriers. This makes it even more important that you consider all types of barriers during the planning stages and use methods that enable more people to be involved. New methods of online engagement including the use of platforms such as: WhatsApp, Zoom, Facebook are useful and enhances the engagement "toolkit" but on the other hand it has made it more challenging for people who experience digital exclusion for whatever reason. it is important to consider how different groups may be impacted and how your practice needs to change.

Part 2. Understanding Community Engagement

Engagement is complex to undertake but once you understand the process you should be able to develop a clear plan that will help you be it will help you plan any community engagement activity.

The use term community engagement varies widely and incorporates words like consultation, participation, collaboration, and empowerment. Community engagement captures its meaning in deciding and working together.

> *It is important to understand that community refers to the groups or individuals or **WHO** you want to engage with, and engagement means the tools and methods you will use or **HOW** you plan to engage.*

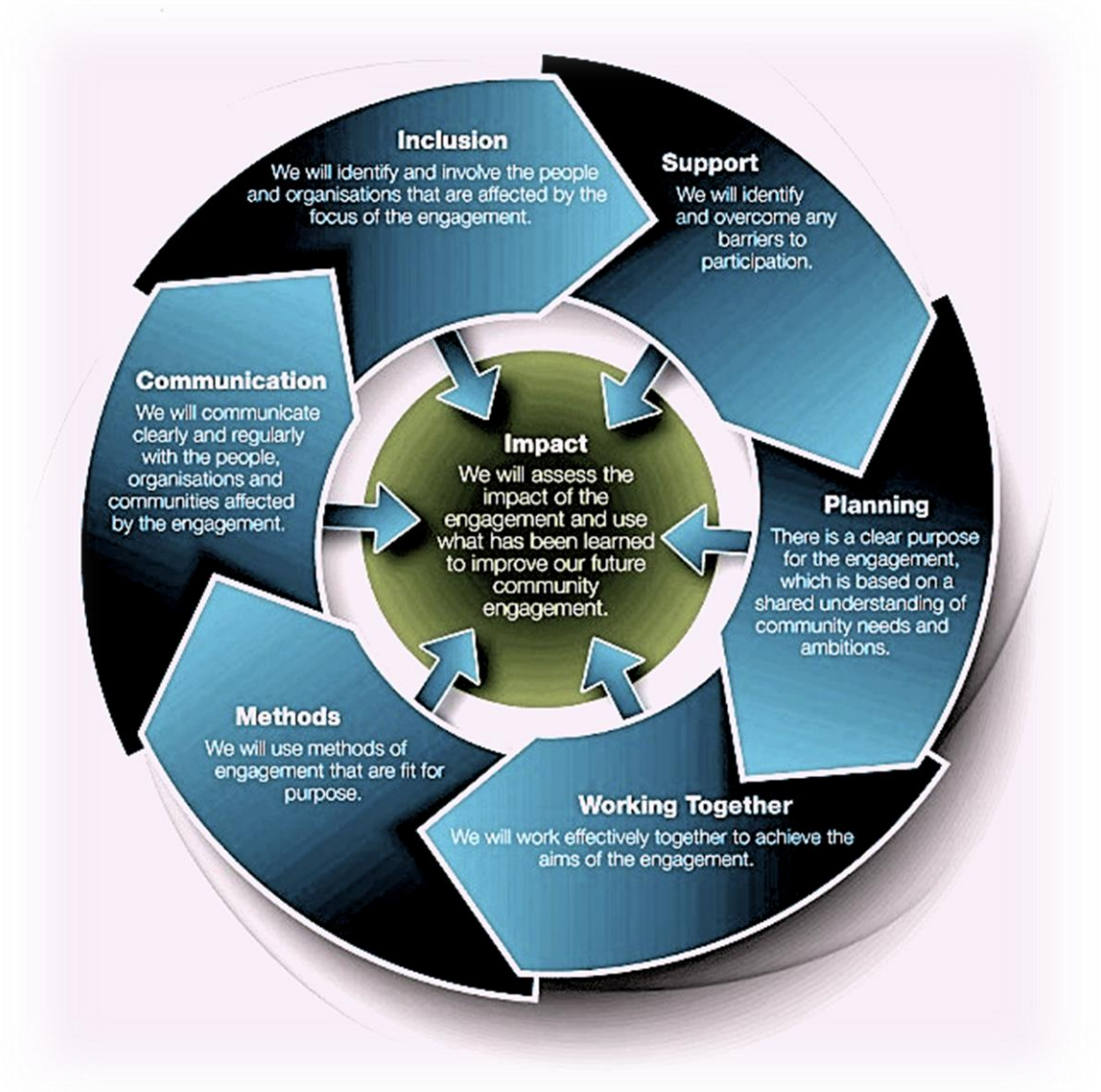
Community refers to a group of people that share
• A common place (for example, your village, within your street or locality) • A common interest (for example, an interest in the environment, sport and health and social care) • A common identity (normally demographic characteristic for example, age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion) • A common need (for example, housing, transport, community spaces)

Engagement is
• A range of interactions which are suitable for all parties involved • A range of activities from simple information giving through to supporting community activity. • Consists of informing, consulting, involving, listening and responding to communities through on-going relationships.

Part 3. National Standards for Community Engagement

The National Standards for Community Engagement are important in supporting organisations in putting the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 into practice. They can be used to shape the participation processes of public bodies as well as shape how community organisations can involve wider community interests.

There a 7 National Standards for Community Engagement and for the purpose of this guide, the Inclusion standard is particularly important.



National Standards for Community Engagement explained

Inclusion

Identify and involve the people and organisations that are affected by the focus of the engagement. How do you know if you have met this Standard?

- The people and groups who are affected by the focus of the engagement are involved at the earliest opportunity.
- **Measures are taken to involve groups with protected characteristics and people who are excluded from participating due to disadvantage relating to social or economic factors.**
- Participants in the community engagement process commit to continued two-way communication with the people they work with or represent.
- A wide range of opinions, including minority and opposing views, are valued in the engagement process.

Note: Protected characteristics

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone because of one of the protected characteristics, which are as follows. Age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation

Support

It is important to identify and overcome any barriers to participation.

How do you know if you have met this Standard?

An assessment of support needs is carried out, involving all participants.

Action is taken to remove or reduce any practical barriers which make it difficult for people to take part in engagement activities.

Access to impartial and independent development support is provided for groups involved in the community engagement process.

Examples of support needs

Suitable transport

Caring for dependants (for example, childcare or care of older people)

Personal assistance or personal care

Suitable and accessible venues and appropriate catering

Access to interpreters

Communication aids

Meetings and events organised at appropriate times

Access to social media, video conferencing and online resources where appropriate

Out-of-pocket expenses

Planning

We will work effectively together to achieve the aims of the engagement.

How do you know if you have met this Standard?

The roles and responsibilities of everyone involved are clear and understood.

Decision-making processes and procedures are agreed and followed.

The methods of communication used during the engagement process meet the needs of all participants.

Information that is important to the engagement process is accessible and shared in time for all participants to properly read and understand it.

Communication between all participants is open, honest and clear.

The community engagement process is based on trust and mutual respect.

Participants are supported to develop their skills and confidence during the engagement.

Working together

There is a clear purpose for the engagement, which is based on a shared understanding of community needs and ambitions.

How do you know if you have met this Standard?

Partners are involved at the start of the process in identifying and defining the focus that the engagement will explore.

A clear and agreed engagement plan is in place.

All available information which can affect the engagement process has been shared and used to develop the community engagement plan.

Partners agree what the outcomes of the engagement process should be, what indicators will be used to measure success, and what evidence will be gathered.

The timescales for the engagement process are realistic.

There are sufficient resources to support an effective engagement process

Methods

We will use methods of engagement that are fit for purpose.

How do you know if you have met this Standard?

The methods used are appropriate for the purpose of the engagement.

The methods used are acceptable and accessible to participants

A variety of methods are used throughout the engagement to make sure that a wide range of voices is heard.

Full use is made of creative methods which encourage maximum participation and effective dialogue.

The methods used are evaluated and adapted, if necessary, in response to feedback from participants and partners.

Some examples of community engagement methods include:

Focus groups, public meetings, mini-publics, questionnaires, participatory budgeting, community action research, online surveys, social-media campaigns, charrettes and story dialogue.

Communication

We will communicate clearly and regularly with the people, organisations and communities affected by the engagement.

How do you know if you have met this Standard?

Information on the community engagement process, and what has happened as a result, is clear and easy to access and understand.

Information is made available in appropriate formats.

Without breaking confidentiality, participants have access to all information that is relevant to the engagement.

Systems are in place to make sure the views of the wider community continuously help to shape the engagement process.

Feedback is a true representation of the range of views expressed during the engagement process.

Feedback includes information on: the engagement process; the options which have been considered; and the decisions and actions that have been agreed, and the reasons why.

Impact

We will assess the impact of the engagement and use what we have learned to improve our future community engagement.

How do you know if you have met this Standard?

The outcomes the engagement process intended to achieve are met.

Decisions which are taken reflect the views of participants in the community engagement process.

Local outcomes, or services, are improved as result of the engagement process.

Participants have improved skills, confidence and ability to take part in community engagement in the future.

Partners are involved in monitoring and reviewing the quality of the engagement process and what has happened as a result.

Feedback is provided to the wider community on how the engagement process has influenced decisions and what has changed as a result.

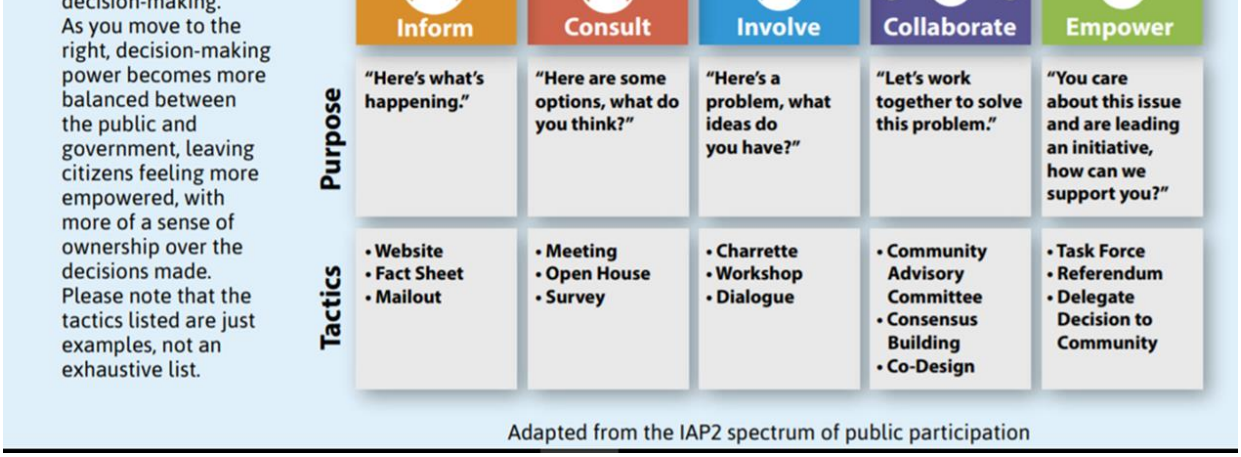
Learning and evaluation helps to shape future community engagement processes.

Using the standards outlined above will help you plan any activity and provide evidence of the steps you have taken to make sure you are reaching those individuals or groups that are 'easy to ignore'.

Part 4. Levels of Community Engagement

It is also important to understand that engagement with individuals and/or communities is challenging and there are 5 different levels of engagement or continuum. Understanding these will also help you understand the **PURPOSE** of your engagement and develop a clear plan and allow you to consider the barriers you need to reduce to make your engagement inclusive.

Each level of engagement is set out below with an explanation of the overall engagement goal, the promise being made to the community, appropriate methods and existing good practice from those planning any engagement activity.



Engagement activity can happen at various levels and can happen at the same time

1. Informing – giving people knowledge and understanding so they are informed. It is important to make sure that any information you offer is delivered in ways that are accessible to all i.e. easy read, relevant format
2. Consulting – asking people what they think so that decision-makers can make even better decisions knowledge so that they are informed
3. Involving – making sure the concerns and needs of the community are properly represented
4. Collaboration working together with the local community
5. Empowering – supporting the local community to act on its own

Planning and designing any engagement activity works best if you understand the thinking behind it and you are clear about the process. When planning an engagement process you need to recognise diversity, identify any potential barriers, and design the process to minimise barriers where possible.

Part 5. Barriers Community Engagement

People are challenging to engage because of the complexities of their situation because of their situations that could range from things not being accessible, cultural differences, lack of confidence, work/life responsibilities, motivation, lack of trust, apathy, lack of awareness of opportunities, people living in poverty, homelessness, language barriers, geography, the list could be endless.

Overcoming Barriers to engagement is not about having communities fit into your world or come together in ways that is convenient for service providers it is about good planning and design. Any engagement process you need to recognise diversity, identify any potential barriers, and design the process to minimise barriers where possible and you need to have skilled practitioners and facilitators.

Groups are easy to ignore until you take time to learn about the communities you want to engage with focus on reducing potential barriers throughout your planning for the outset.

Part 6. Your Approach

When undertaking any engagement activity, the importance of your approach can never be understated. If you are open, honest, friendly and welcoming people will be more likely to engage with you but you also have to build relationships and do your homework. We have put together a list below that should help your approach.

- **Build trust –** show that you're listening by inviting people, traditionally easy to ignore, may have different priorities from you, and they need to be heard.
- **Know who your community** (demographics, stakeholders, networks) and how they get their information. This knowledge is the foundation to help you design community engagement activities and communicate about your project.
- **Work in partnership** with those groups and organisations active in the area or with groups you want to engage with. They have local connections and have built up trust.

- **Find a form of engagement that works** for different groups and individuals – consider a wide range of potential channels including visual, audio, online and, where possible, face-to-face engagement. Make it easy to engage with you.
- **Go beyond digital engagement** – consider the digital divide and what this means for your communities.
- **Make it beneficial to the communities you engage with** – always let people know the benefits of engaging. And first engage on matters that are of most concern to the people you are trying to reach.

- **Go to where people and groups congregate**, do not expect them to come to you
- **Make it easy and fun** for them to participate in terms of non-threatening and accessible venues, suitable times, transport options, food and beverages
- **Create shared spaces** where everyone is treated with dignity and respect where individuals can discuss the issues firsthand.
- **Piggyback** on existing events or gatherings, for example local gala days, festivals, picnics etc

- **Use existing community networks** and forms of communication to publicise events and identify opportunities to align or hold combined events for greater impact.
- **Ask for people's personal story**. Encourage people to express their experiences and opinions in their own words first
- **Use technology ... if it's a fit**. There are many great high tech and low tech ways to engage people so pick strategies that are a fit with whom you are trying to reach.

- **Communication materials** should be jargon free and in plain English; available in accessible formats and provided in alternative language(s) as appropriate.
- **Think about the details**. When you hold a community event think through how you can make it more inclusive (e.g. time, location, child care, transportation, food, translators, facilitators).
- **Make sure any venue you use is accessible** to people with physical and sensory impairments, including parking, public transport drop-off points etc

Make your community engagement fun, it's about being flexible with the methods you use! When you bring people together for any reason, think about how you can make it a social opportunity too.

Part 7. Ideas to help you engage with easy to ignore groups

Engagement is about recognising the unique circumstances of easy to ignore groups and that traditional methods of engagement such as public meetings and workshops do not always work. It is about thinking beyond the usual methods of engagement and encouraging all members of the community to voice their opinions, ideas, and concerns. The best way to do this is to understand and address the barriers to participation. This section aims to provide you with tips about how to effectively engage with different communities, identifying any groups or offering general insights. We have not assumed that all the issues are the same for each group or that all the approaches to engagement get complicated every time.

GENERAL INSIGHTS

Use plain language and keep messages simple and easy to understand

Think about the practicalities and make sure any venue or method you use is accessible.

Do you research and get to know the people you want to involve and build relationships

Do not parachute into an area, work in partnership with people who know their communities

Provide incentives, cover travel costs, vouchers etc

Use the right methods – provide a range of methods, some people lack confidence to speak in front of others, some people have problems reading/writing

Create the right atmosphere and shared space its your job to make it feel inclusive

Go to people especially where theynaturally congregate

Don't duplicate, build on or join in what is already happening

Do not make presumptions about people or communities, everyone is different

DISABLED PEOPLE

Be considerate of the fact that people with disabilities may need more time to voice their opinions, may prefer to provide feedback in written format or may need questions or the discussion topic forwarded ahead of time to prepare their contribution.

Written material may need to be in large font for people who have a vision impairment.

BSL interpreters and hearing loops may be required for meetings if deaf people are attending

The venue should be located near public transport and have suitable access for wheelchair buses or maxi-taxis to stop nearby.

Check the venue's accessibility for the little Things: can the toilet door be opened independently Is there enough space in communal areas for large scooters, is there sufficient space between tables

If you are not sure of people's communication or mobility requirements, it is better to ask, than assume

Consider that people may have different eating requirements and catering should be carefully selected. Drinking straws should also be provided for people who may have limited mobility.

Travel to your participants. It is easier for two able bodied people to travel than 10 people with disabilities all requiring different travel needs.

Provide opportunities for people to participate online

People with learning difficulties find it easier if you communicate using plain short messages and add some pictures that to any text

MINORITY ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Make sure your venue has appropriate multilingual signage – or bring your own.

Language can be a barrier to participation. Interpreters may be necessary to ensure that complex issues are fully understood, and information may need to be distributed in key community languages.

Some people may not be comfortable in a mixed gender forum. It may be appropriate to run women or men only engagement activities

Be aware of special days or events that may clash with your event, such as cultural days, celebrations, or religious festivals.

Use existing networks and groups to connect with minority ethnic communities

Understand that there is diversity between and within minority ethnic groups and that targeted engagement may be necessary. For example, certain cultural or ethnic groups may not mix. Be aware of this, do your research and speak to people who work in the sector

Go to places where groups come together to meet or socialise

Enlist the support of trusted members in the community

OLDER PEOPLE

Consider the time of day of your event. Evening events may not be appropriate, as some older people may not feel comfortable or safe going out at night. This can apply to all groups.

Make sure any venue you use is fully accessible and close to public transport stops

Online activities and consultations may not suit some people, consider texting, phoning or post invites, questionnaires

Do not use jargon or buzz words, keep the language simple

Host a coffee morning or tea dance or go to one of their social gatherings

YOUNG PEOPLE

Online forums and social networks can be a quick and easy way to connect with and engage young peopleMake sure any venue you use is fully accessible and close to public transport stops

Support young people some may not have the confidence to speak in public

Get creative let young people have some creative activities i.e. music, dance, acting, drawing

Make your promotional material age appropriate

Go to where young people are including youth clubs, schools etc

LGBT+

Build trust

Provide venues with gender neutral toilets

Have a safe space statement visible and set boundaries with all participants

Understand the importance of pronouns and if you are not sure which one to use for an individual ask or you can have people introduce themselves and state their preferred pronoun. Some groups use name labels with pronouns to avoid any awkwardness

Support young people some may not have the confidence to speak in public

Get creative let young people have some creative activities i.e. music, dance,

Go to where people naturally congregate

Work in partnership with local groups and organisations

GYPSY TRAVELLERS

Work in partnership with organisations and service that have established relationships

Create links and build trust – start with visiting registered sites

Provide incentives including food, vouchers

Vary your methods 1-1 informal conversations may be useful

Do not presume people are digitally excluded

Consider literacy levels, many people in transient communities may not have had the opportunity to learn to read or write

If people are travelling find out when they will be available or ‘back in the area’

Work in partnership with local groups and organisations

Get to know the hierarchy and trusted members in each community

HOMELESS

Work in partnership with organisations and service that have established relationships

Ask local support services for incentive ideas to participate in more structured engagement such as a focus group. For some people, an incentive such as a lunch, mobile top up or voucher can make a huge difference

Consider undertaking surveys etc at outreach services or community centres. It is much better to go to people, rather than wait for them to attend an event

Ask community members who are homeless to undertake the engagement, that may be a good way to actively encourage involvement in the project

Have a chat over food and a tea or coffee. This can help normalise the conversation and make everyone relaxed

Display information in community or outreach centres, hostels, job centres, local service that support the homeless community

Part 8. Sample action plan

We have reinforced through this guidance that having a considered plan is essential to the success of your engagement activity. It is important you know who you want to engage with, the level of engagement, the methods you plan to use, and you understand and look at reducing barriers at this stage. The plan does not need to be complicated, in fact we would recommend you keep it simple.

Plan Title	Date
Purpose of the Engagement	
Target Community	**Level of Engagement**
What barriers to engagement do you need to consider?	**How do you plan to overcome these barriers?**
Who else needs to be involved?	**How will you publicise your activities**
What methods do you plan to use?	
Activity Schedule	**Timeline**
Activity Type	
1 i.e mapping	
2 i.e. networking	
3	
4	

We also have an accessible events toolkit to assist you in planning your event. You can find it at https://centreforequalities.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/fce-accessible-events-toolkit-oct17.pdf

We can also provide assistive equipment to help make you event more accessible, for more information or to book equipment https://centreforequalities.org.uk/booking/

For further information or guidance, please contact info@centreforequalities.org.uk