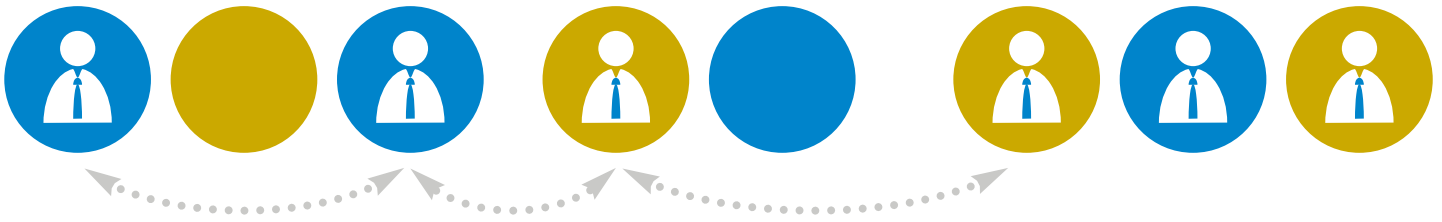# Engagement & Participation

The purpose of engagement is to develop and sustain a *"working relationship between one or more public body and one or more community group, to help them both understand and act on the needs or issues that the community experience." (Scottish National Occupational Standards for Community Engagement)*

Community engagement is an umbrella term which covers many approaches and methods. It is a long term process and initial engagements may focus on information sharing and relationship building. At this level most of the power and control in making decisions will remain with statutory bodies. As relationships and capacity develop engagement should lead to greater participation of older people in decision making.

Good engagement will lead to increased participation.

"Participation is the involvement in the process of making a decision." (Involve UK)

Engagement and participation are processes which involve on-going communication between communities and services. There should be time and space built into the process to ensure communication is reflective of what is being said and decisions being made .

"Genuine engagement is a continuous process rather than a one-off event. Engagement takes a shift in attitudes within the organisation, especially on issues of power in relationships with service users. Ideally engagement should be embedded in working on projects from start to finish." (AgeUK)

Sherry Arnstein (1969) designed a *"ladder of participation"* to denote the five levels of participation. This is an adaptation by David Wilcox (1994) illustrating the five levels of participation.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND HEALTH NETWORK

www.cdhn.org

A QUICK GUIDE

- What is engagement and participation
- Benefits of engagement and participation
- Where to start
- Facilitators and Barriers
- Methods

THE FIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Greater need for support and capacity building

HIGH

5 **SUPPORTING.** Supporting independent community initiative through funding, advice and other resources

4 **ACTING TOGETHER** deciding together what is best and forming a partnership to carryout the joint decision

3 **DECIDING TOGETHER** encouragement to create additional ideas or options; deciding jointly on the best way forward

2 **DECIDING TOGETHER** encouragement to create additional ideas or options; deciding jointly on the best way forward

1 **INFORMATION GIVING** telling people what is planned, sharing knowledge

LOW

Before starting to engage there are a few questions which will help you decide what level and method of engagement is appropriate. It is important to be clear and realistic when answering these questions.

THINK

WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE AND WHY?
Aims and objectives, and how you will communicate these.

THINK

WHO YOU NEED TO ENGAGE WITH?
Target group/community and diversity within this. Consider what relationship you have with them.

THINK

HOW MUCH TIME AND RESOURCE CAN YOU ALLOCATE?
Time, personnel and finance, be careful not to over stretch.

THINK

WHAT ARE SKILL AND CAPACITY LEVELS, WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION, PARTNER ORGANISATIONS AND THE COMMUNITY?
Would training, mentoring or other support be beneficial.

THINK

HOW WILLING ARE ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS TO SHARE DECISION MAKING AND POWER??
Balance of power. Who will input into decisions, how this is decided and communicated.

PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES
poor health, disability and caring responsibilities can act as barriers to an older person's availability and ability to participate. Consider arranging home visits for those who can not attend, particularly vulnerable and house

LACK OF CONFIDENCE AND SKILL
this can be for both the older person and the organisation initiating the engagement. Training, support and experience can help.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE
negative experiences can put people off engaging. If people feel they are not being heard or are unable to affect change they can become disengaged.

Be clear and up front about the purpose of the engagement and set realistic expectations. Remember high quality low level engagement is preferable to poor quality high level engagement.

ACCESS
consider time, transport needs and venue suitability. Use appropriate targeted communication, provide transport and ensure venues are warm and disabled friendly
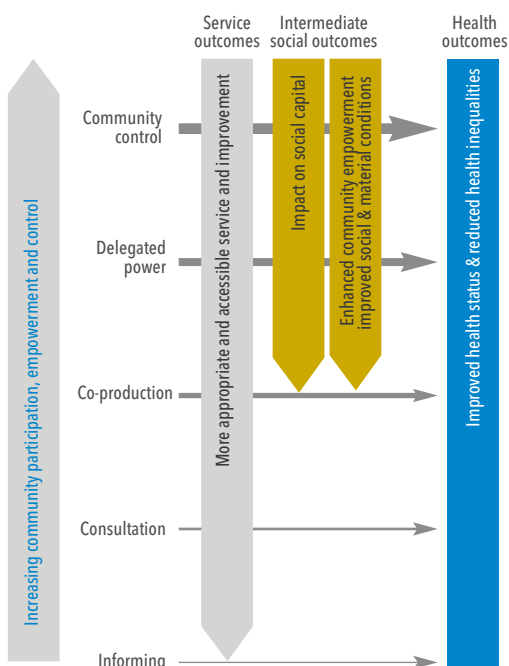
CULTURE
he culture of the organisation and/or the community may not be immediately receptive to engaging. Cultural and language differences will impact on the process and outcome. Take time to get to know and understand the community.

BENEFITS OF ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Pathways from community participation, empowerment and control to health improvement

Arnstien's ladder of participation was adapted by J. Popay (2006) to illustrate the impact of participation and empowerment. It illustrates how increased participation and empowerment is linked with improved outcomes for health, services and socially.

Below are some of the possible reasons for these improved outcomes.

Helps understand local needs and aspirations engagement can provide communities with the time and space to reflect, articulate and share their needs and aspirations. This enables the community and services to be responsive to these needs.

Improves service design, delivery and raising standards within services - "not only can organisations use engagement to make sure their services fit a community's needs, they can also find out about and improve customer satisfaction. This includes checking what people think about what the organisation is doing, identifying and solving problems, and helping people understand how they work." (AgeUK)

Promotes empowerment - empowerment has positive health and social benefits at both an individual and community level.

Increases social cohesion - As communities and public bodies begin to build a deeper understanding of each other and create shared experiences and aspirations, this builds social capital, and promotes citizen activity.

Builds skill and creates buy-in among staff - good engagement with service users can give staff a greater sense of purpose and increase job satisfaction, while building skills of staff and the community.

Method	What it can be used for and how	Level of participation	Benefits	Drawbacks
Newsletters and leaflets. One off, or regular updates Printed, audio and online	Sharing information, advertising events, providing feedback on a consultation process.	INFORMING	Can reach a large number of people.	One way flow of information.
Word of mouth Community champions or workers with strong links to the community	Sharing information, advertising.	INFORMING	Can reach and encourage disengaged and isolated people to be become involved	Some people may "Gate-keep", only informing those they want to be involved . Lack of control over the sharing of information.
Surveys Face to face, over the phone or online.	Gathering information. feedback and opinions.	CONSULTATION	Efficient way of gathering large amount of data.	No opportunity to clarify responses. Often have low response rates.
Interviews	Face to face or over the phone. Gathering information, opinions and feedback.	CONSULTATION	Opportunity to build trust and engage "hard to reach". Can explore issues in depth.	Dependant on the skills of the interviewer. Can be resource intensive.
Focus groups	Gather information, opinions, feedback.	CONSULTATION & DECIDING TOGETHER	Allows issues to be explored in depth.	Can be time consuming, and yield a large amount of information which needs to be processed.
Workshops/events One off or on-going Variety of methods such as, information stalls, world café focus groups, dialogue groups, community conversations	They can be about sharing and/or gathering information and opinions.	INFORMING, CONSULTATIONDECIDING TOGETHER AND ACTING TOGETHER.	Can be about sharing and gathering information. Able to reach large numbers at once. Can build social cohesion	Can be costly. Can be resource intensive.
Citizen forums	Older people are able to voice opinions and use this to influence decisions	DECIDING TOGETHER, ACTING TOGETHER, SUPPORTING	Promotes empowerment. Reflective of older people's issues. Independent of services.	Does not work well with disempowered communities and those with low capacity.
Action research/participatory research Incorporates many of the above methods as well as community audits and profiles	Older people have the opportunity to voice opinions and influence and shape decisions.	DECIDING TOGETHER, ACTING TOGETHER, SUPPORTING	Promotes empowerment.Builds skills.Builds social capital.Reflective of community issues.	Time consuming, may require skill and capacity building.