

## Co-production: representation

How do we bring the right range of diverse voices to the conversation?

### Assumptions and labelling

It's important to remember that people often have hidden characteristics, so we need to remain open to what they might bring to the table beyond first appearances.

- Even if someone presents as a stereotypical representative of a community, they may not wholly represent all views from that community.
- Alternatively, some people may be in tune with and speak for differing views in their communities or represent more than one community.

Question to consider: what can this person bring to the table?

### The usual suspects

Professionals often express the desire to move beyond the 'usual suspects', meaning they want to draw on a broad range of people who represent different communities and avoid the small group of people who always seem to attend. Issues related to this are:

- People might face challenging questions about their *representation*\* and how well they represent people in their community.
- We need to beware of the implication that communities are not likely to be represented by someone articulate who understands the system.
- Often the usual suspects are quite knowledgeable about their community and they have a good track record of reaching a wider audience within their community. They may be an avenue to connecting with seldom-heard members of their communities.
- People may have a large network behind them, meaning that they are able to bring thoughts and experiences from across that network. They may talk about their own as well as **other people's lived experience**.

Question to consider: does equitable representation exclude the usual suspects?

### Connecting with seldom-heard community representatives

Below are some suggestions for ways to involve as many community representatives as possible in *co-production* activities. It's important to note that there isn't a 'one size fits all' solution, and people implementing co-production may need to choose the right approach for each situation.

- As participants may be able to contribute at differing levels of commitment, consider offering different tiers of participation such as:
  - Completing a survey - a few minutes.
  - Relating their story - an hour or two.

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\* [Definitions of keywords are included on page 4](#)

- Working group – several times a month.
- Varying ways of engaging with people can help to reach different community members:
  - Visiting churches, barbers, or other places where people already get together.
  - Taking a computer to people's houses to enable access.
  - Reaching out to organisations and partners who are involved with relevant communities.
- Over-recruitment of seldom-heard demographic groups can help to ensure enough people actually attend activities.
- A flexible approach that acknowledges people might not be able to attend every session will ensure as many representatives as possible are able to get involved.
- Avoid the 'shopping list' approach to including people as this is potentially tokenistic.

Question to consider: **who isn't at the table and why?**

## Creating a safe, inclusive and equitable environment for co-production

Once you have gathered participants for co-production activities, creating an inclusive and non-threatening environment will help them to talk freely, collaborate effectively, and encourage continued participation.

This is especially important where participants come from differing backgrounds in terms of education, employment and language as some people may experience anxiety in these circumstances.

Ways to create trust in the co-production environment include:

- Make an initial declaration of empathy and understanding, acknowledging the vulnerability associated with being open and offering support and safety.
- Setting ground rules. These can be set by the participants themselves to define aspects like the use of language and desired outcomes.
- Consider arranging group activities outside of co-production to enable relationships to develop and foster trust between participants.
- Value all voices equally to avoid any suggestion of hierarchy amongst participants.
- Consider adopting an [Experience Based Design](#) model where groups of participants meet separately to discuss their experiences before bringing all participants together.

Question to consider: how are participants feeling?

## Enabling professional participation in co-production

As part of ensuring *multi-dimensional representation*, it's important to involve clinicians and other health and social care professionals in co-production processes. This can present challenges related to current workload pressures and long-standing cultural attitudes to feedback and decision-making.

Ways to encourage professional participation include:

- Clarify and demystify the co-production process so that potential participants understand the importance of co-producing services and the benefits of co-production (rather than other consultative activities).

- Show examples of other health and social care sector organisations successfully implementing co-production.
- Allow time and resources for co-production activities, and acknowledge and appreciate the time given by staff.
- Acknowledge fear of negative feedback and maintain focus on the outcome of improving services.
- Deliver co-production workshops and training.
- Ensure processes to support co-production are in place (for example, recruitment and reimbursement of participants, cross-departmental working arrangements).
- Recruit senior leader 'co-production champions'.
- Consider focusing on broad perspectives rather than single-issue improvements which risk distorting care for other health issues.
- Remember that issues which concern people who draw upon health and social care services are also often areas of concern for staff. Focusing on a shared desire for improvement can dampen the effect of perceived 'negative' criticism.
- Build trust and an environment of shared responsibility for the services through continued participation.
- Let potential participants know that changes to services aren't necessarily going to be expensive or disruptive. Often people who draw upon health and care services have requests or suggestions which are easy and inexpensive to implement.

Question to consider: does the time taken for implementing co-production save time in the end?

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## Resources

[Rebel Ideas: The Power of Thinking Differently: Syed, Matthew](#) (Book)

[About Co-production](#) - Co-production Works (Pete Fleischmann)

[Spectrum of Public Participation](#) - IAP2

[Spectrum of Participation](#) - People Hub

[Co-Production - a new definition](#) - People Hub

[Ladder of Co-production](#) - Think Local Act Personal

[10 Top Tips for Co-production](#) - Think Local Act Personal



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## Definitions

### Co-production

Co-production is a way of working which involves groups of relevant people collaborating to plan, design and develop new services. This may include people who draw on health and social care services, carers, community representatives, clinicians, service providers, subject matter experts and others.

Processes of evaluating, adjusting or improving existing health and social care services can also be 'co-produced'. This means that any changes to services are influenced by the views of people who draw upon, deliver, or have other experiences of those services.

### Co-production is not...

Co-production is often confused with 'consultation'. Consultation is a process of obtaining feedback on a planned service which has already been partially or completely designed. Effective co-production engages groups of people at the earliest stages of service design, development and evaluation.

Co-production builds on and is related to citizen participation, public engagement, patient and public voice programmes, service user involvement and self-advocacy. It does not replace or duplicate these activities.

### Lived experience

Co-production acknowledges that people with 'lived experience' of a particular condition or healthcare pathway are often best placed to advise on what support and services will make a positive difference in their lives.

Not everyone with lived experience engages in co-production activities. It's important to remember that the views of the small group of people who engage with co-production may not represent all the people with lived experience of health and social care services.

### Representation

In this context, representation means speaking on behalf of a group of people.

Co-production activities are most effective when all relevant parties are equitably included, or represented, in the process.

Issues of diversity and accessibility may lead to some groups being under-represented in co-production activities.

### Multi-dimensional representation

Ensuring that all relevant parties are represented **doesn't just** refer to community members. **It's important that** all stakeholders, including clinicians, service providers, technical experts and others, are included in co-production activities.