

Hints and Tips

Participation by older people

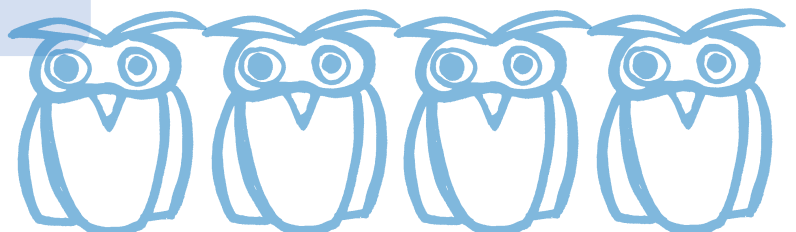
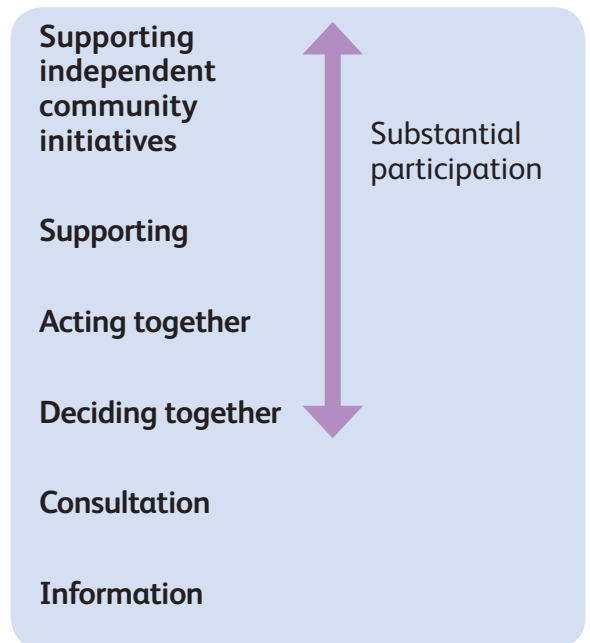
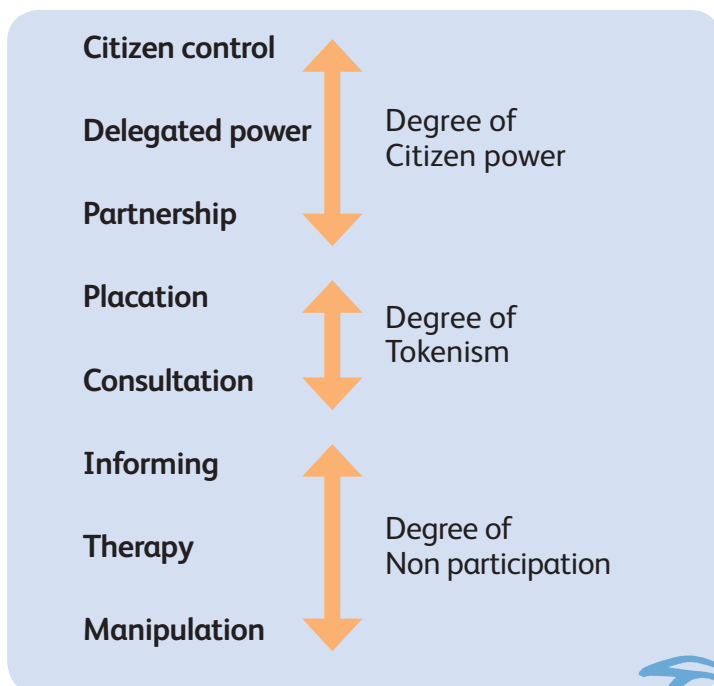
What participation is and why it matters

What is participation?

Participation is people being part of decisions that affect them.

In the 1960s Sherry Arnstien described a ladder of participation with increasing levels of involvement and influence. At the highest level are people making decisions themselves. This ladder is used in many countries and situations.

In the 1990s David Wilcox described another ladder, which covers the levels of participation by the public or people using services in public services.



Why participation matters

Participation by people living in Scotland and other parts of the UK has grown a lot over the past 15-20 years and is now a part of daily life.

- People who live in an area have a voice in planning for many aspects of how communities work.
- Many businesses and services that we use ask for feedback from their customers and want the views of potential customers.
- Participation is an integral part of how public services are run. An example is the new arrangements for integrating health and social care services, which emphasise participation by people who get support, family and friends who are carers, and people living in local areas.

The benefits from people being part of decisions include:

- Buildings, services and systems that work better for the people concerned and achieve what was intended.
- Better use of all the available resources.
- People feeling more confident and having better wellbeing when they are contributing.

The feedback from older people is that the arrangements for participation sometimes do not work well for them.

- People with higher support needs or who are less active in their community are less likely to hear about opportunities to be involved.
- The practical arrangements may not work so well for them. Examples are public meetings in places that are not accessible and where it is hard to hear what is happening, and reliance on online and social media-based participation that older people are more likely to find difficult.
- Bodies that are there to represent, or be a route for, people in an area may focus more on people of working age and unintentionally miss out older people (and also other groups).
- The way questions or issues are phrased comes from a starting point that does not reflect the perspective of older people.
- People who are planning or leading consultations and other forms of participation can assume that older people are not interested, or do not want to be bothered.

- This applies to participation that is aimed at the wider community.
- It also arises in situations that is only or mostly about older people.

“The meetings are at night or first thing in the morning. Why don’t they ask us what is best for us and then work round that.”

“I find it hard to hear what is being said in larger groups. I also like to have things written down so I can check back. I like to send my thoughts in later when I have had a chance to think about it. Sometimes it feels so rushed and there is really no need.”

Topics on which people participate

People can participate on many different topics.

- Their own situation or experience. An example is people being part of planning or reviewing the support they get from health and/or social care services.
- Participating in how a particular service works. Examples are service user groups for a community service that meet regularly and surveys that ask how a service worked for the people who used it.
- Shaping how services will work for older people, or for another group of people – such as people in BME communities, or people living in a local area. Examples are an Older People’s Forum or Reference Group that draws together views from older people across a local authority area.
- Participating in wider issues that affect the whole community. An example is being part of consultation on plans to redevelop the shopping area in a town.

In general, people find it harder, and a lot more frustrating, when they are asked to participate on big issues that affect many people but have few or no opportunities to have their say on what happens in their own lives.

People will raise the issues that are important to them. These might not be on the topics that other people, such as staff in public sector services, are expecting.



When the Make it Happen Forum asked older people in Falkirk about their priorities, the list included seating in the new Helix Park, starting a local branch of University of the Third Age, and more access to toilets in the town centre. Issues about health and care service were further down the list.

“It’s realising that people can choose to be involved at one time, not involved at another time, and then get involved again later on when they are feeling better. It’s keeping the door open even when a group or a person said no to the first invitation.”

“We are not doing enough to make sure services are reflecting the changes in our population. Services need to include people who are coming to Scotland now and reflect their needs.”

“We need to have more ways for people to participate, so people can find the participation route that is right and comfortable for them: events, talking to individual people, someone coming out to groups and individuals, people who know older people being part of it, and more.”

Tips for older people’s groups

Tell people about the opportunities that are there for older people to have an influence.

Find out about the Forum or any groups with the Council or NHS that take up issues affecting older people. Build up an on-going relationship, such as including an item about them in your newsletter or invite them to come along and meet people at your group.

Create opportunities for people to talk about issues on which there is consultation or other types of participation. Many people find that talking through an issue helps them work out what they want to say and how to express it.

Help members who find it difficult to use the methods that are available. Examples could be doing online responses from the computer in the office, or someone writing the response for someone whose sight is poor or finds writing difficult.

Encourage the public bodies or other community groups to include the older people you know when they are gathering people’s experiences and views.

- This could be offering to have a consultation meeting or something similar at your venue.
- Give your suggestions on ways to make it easier for people to contribute.

Support the people – members of workers – who are representing the views of other people in committees or working groups or the like.

- Help them hear the experiences and views of other people, to give them more credibility and influence.
- Help them feedback to other older people on what is happening.
- Some people like this sort of role but others don’t. or take time to learn and become confident. Make sure that they do not become stressed or anxious, and have someone to talk to about their role.

Another forum for older people in a rural area takes a different approach.

“We meet as a forum to discuss services and issues that are important to us as older people, with organisations like the local council, and NHS. But we also organise social activities and have made links with other community groups. We did this because our members also told us that having social activities and things to do during the week and at weekend was very important.”



“Tell them about how to include the people you know, or people with dementia, and anyone else who may get missed. Especially if they haven’t asked.”

“We always write after anything like a consultation and ask for feedback on what they are doing with our views. It reminds them that we’re here.”

Tips for older people contributing their own views and experiences

Say what you like about a service, or whatever **you** are participating about, as well as listing anything that is wrong. That helps the people getting the responses know what to build on.

Also try to suggest how things could be better if you have ideas.

Remember that you can feed in your own suggestions and be part of a group response.

Some people find that contributing their experiences is upsetting if it means going back over a difficult experience. Remind yourself that this will help make things better for other people. Also do something to look after yourself.

“Say as little or as much about your own situation as you feel is right for you. The aim is to influence a decision, not to get people upset.”

“I get together with a few of my pals and we do a wee joint response on Netta’s computer. We say we’re a group with less than 10 members. It’s been easier that way for us as we look after each other.”

Tips for people who are the representatives of other people

Keep checking back with other people.

- Tell them what is happening at the planning group or wherever you are representing their interests.
- Ask people what is happening now for them, so the views and experiences you are contributing are recent.

Get support for yourself in this role.

- Check out if there is any training in your area, or look at resources on this. Some of the sources at the end of this note are good starting points. Have a friend or someone else in the group to contact if you want to wind down after a meeting or whatever.
- Build in ways to keep yourself well.

“I enjoy being part of the committee with the Council and explaining what life is like for older people. It’s a way to give something back.”

“This is the sort of thing I used to do at work. I’m quite good at it. There are lots of other things that other people in the Forum are good at. We work to our strengths and share the load.”

“I’ve learned to keep the day after the big meetings clear. That way I can get my notes in order and do an update for the rest of the committee and then for our website and newsletter. And if it was a frustrating meeting I start by going for a walk and shouting out a few bad words.”

Tips for staff who deliver services

Tell the people you know about opportunities to participate.

Find out about routes such as the Forums or the working groups with the Council and NHS in your area. That way, if someone raises a concern or question that is not part of your remit, you can explain how the person can take it forward.

Some people who want to be involved in participation groups such as Forums will also be getting help with personal care or need to manage their wellbeing. You can work with them to work out how they can manage to take part. For example, can a care visit or medication be earlier or later on the meeting days?



"It's helpful to find out about the different ways people can participate in things. It doesn't have to be just at meetings. We often have a question or two to ask people when staff are there. We leave the question with the person for a few days so they can think about, rather than expecting an instant response. We have found that way more people are involved and we get some really good suggestions."

Tips for people planning or leading participation

Think about older people, including people who have higher support needs, in all the participation work you do where they may be affected or have something to contribute.

If you are not sure how to reach and include this group of people, ask.

Be open to different ways for people to participate.

"Start where people are. Talk, ask, find out what matters to them, listen."

"Have conversations. Tea and a blether can be a better way to encourage older people – and most other people – to contribute."

"If you hear something that is not as relevant to the issue you are working on, please pass it on to a colleague who can take it on. We're not the experts in how big services and systems are managed. We just know what will make it better for us and for other older people."

More information

We're Here Too raises the profile of participation by older people who have higher support needs. The report has suggestions and examples on ways to ensure the voices of all older people are heard.

There is also a list of forums and other groups through which older people in Scotland participate.

www.otbds.org/werehere

The Scottish Health Council has a lot of useful information, including the standards NHS boards are expected to meet in their participation arrangements, practical tools to help people carry out good participation, and case examples of what people have done and the impact it has had.

www.scottishhealthcouncil.org

There are **National Standard for Community Engagement in Scotland**, that explain what is good practice for everyone's role. www.otbds.org/participationresources

Influencing Change is a report based on the experience of groups Outside the Box has worked with. It has practical tips and examples on ways community groups can influence what other people do, including public services and other organisations that deliver services.

www.otbds.org/wtinfluence/

About Wisdom in Practice

Wisdom in Practice is a project which supports and promotes the development of services and other activities led by older people. It is funded by the Scottish Government through the Equalities Programme and is run by Outside the Box. There is a range of resources for groups, including publications, how to guides, events and development support for individual groups and projects.

This is one of a series of Hints and Tips on topics which groups led by older people have said help them in starting their groups and keeping going.

Wisdom in Practice has its own website www.wisdominpractice.org.uk



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