Getting Started with Lived Experience Engagement

Meaningful engagement of people with lived experience of homelessness means doing more than inviting individuals to share their stories. It involves recognizing lived experience as valuable expertise and creating opportunities for that knowledge to influence policies, programs, services, and decisions.

People who have experienced homelessness bring perspectives that can help organizations identify service gaps, challenge assumptions, and develop more responsive approaches. However, meaningful engagement depends not only on who participates, but also on how their participation is supported and valued.

Moving Beyond Consultation

Meaningful engagement means making opportunities for people with lived expertise to contribute to decision-making, rather than simply provide feedback. Without genuine influence, participation risks becoming tokenistic, serving to demonstrate inclusion without creating meaningful change.
It is also important to recognize that no individual can represent the experiences of everyone who has faced homelessness. Inclusive engagement values diverse identities, perspectives, and experiences.

Foundations of Meaningful Engagement

The Insight to Impact toolkit identifies four principles that support ethical and equitable engagement:

- **Ethical engagement:** Prioritizing safety, agency, consent, and boundaries.
- **Equity and inclusion:** Recognizing diversity of experience and addressing barriers to participation.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Establishing clear expectations, communicating decision-making processes, and demonstrating how contributions are used.
- **Trauma-informed and anti-oppressive practices:** Recognizing power imbalances and preventing tokenization, exploitation, and re-traumatization.

Putting these principles into practice involves fair compensation, accessible participation options, clearly defined roles, and opportunities for meaningful influence.

Before You Begin

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to lived experience engagement. Organizations must consider their own readiness, resources, and capacity to support meaningful participation.
Before inviting people with lived expertise to participate, organizations should reflect on whether they are prepared to share decision-making power, provide appropriate support, and act on the knowledge being shared.

Meaningful engagement goes beyond listening. It requires relationships grounded in respect, trust, and shared responsibility, where lived expertise contributes to meaningful change.

For further guidance on ethical and sustainable engagement, explore the Insight to Impact Toolkit.