



Top Tips for Engaging with Adults with Learning Disabilities

1. First Steps

- People with Learning Disabilities (LD) can work to coproduce a wide variety of projects including design, delivery, evaluation and governance at most levels.
- Issues of confidentiality are very important to discuss and take account of, especially when using carers, family, and friends to support communication.
- Make sure you have a working understanding of coproduction and align yourself to a shared definition to aid a common understanding. Here is an example of a [model](#).
- Do not make assumptions. People with LD are not a homogenous group, and the term covers a broad range of people from different backgrounds, and with different abilities, skills and talents.
- Tailor opportunities to individuals' preferences, talents, passions, and aspirations. Be led by what matters to the community most.
- Make contact before the activity, supply accessible information and the intended purpose and outcomes of the engagement, and answer any queries.
- Think about the duration and timing of your activities. Concentration over extended periods may not promote optimum engagement, ask the individual/group what works best for them.

2. Invest in the Relationship

- People with LD often face stigma, discrimination, exclusion, and harm – so invest in the relationship. Always put the relationship and the comfort of the person first.
- Be overtly and genuinely kind, compassionate, welcoming, and inclusive – use the power of the relationship to build trust as this will help individuals feel seen, safe, and valued.
- Be creative, reflective, and flexible. Listen attentively.
- Connect with the community through established, safe and trusted organisations and charities who already work with people with LD.

3. Environment, Environment, Environment

- Be mindful of sensory needs and do not overload people with too much stimulation and sensory input, to aid processing ability and concentration. Consider comfort levels such as noise, temperature and whether the person is hungry, thirsty or needs to use the bathroom.



- Ensure your venue is accessible to people who use mobility aids and consider other disabilities and impairments. Check out people's access needs in advance and make reasonable adjustments e.g. BSL, hearing loop, Makaton.
 - Offer alternative ways people can get involved for people who cannot attend your activity, so everyone can contribute in a way that is manageable for them. Ask them how they want to be involved.
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4. Careful, Considered and Personalised Communication

- Find out the communication needs of the person prior to the activity; whether supporting information in an Easy Read format would be helpful and/or refer to their Communication Passport if they have one. Communication Passports are a tool to support people who cannot easily speak for themselves. Find out more [here](#).
 - Communicate succinctly and purposively. Avoid complicated words, sentences, jargon, sarcasm and jokes. Use simple explanations and use visual support such as pictures and key sentences to convey information. Offer choices but not too many.
 - Allow plenty of time for the person to process what has been said and think about their response; this may feel like an uncomfortable silence, but it is key processing time.
 - Check understanding of communication and encourage the individual to summarise, paraphrase and reflect back what has been said. And check your understanding of what the person has said – communication is a two-way process.
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5. Recognise and Reward

- People's time and labour are precious. Ask about how they wish to be remunerated, recognized and rewarded for the work they have undertaken.
 - Be transparent about rewards and recognitions in advance of the activity and do not set up systems that adversely affect people i.e. have an impact on state benefit entitlement. Coproduce a system that works for them.
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6. Real Power

- Impress on people the very real and meaningful difference they are making and share your vision. Update them on any improvements made as a result of their involvement.
 - Thank people for their time and expertise and check in on people's experiences of your activity to reflect on and refine your approach.
 - Be proactive and transparent in addressing any issues or problems that people have experienced.
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