



Short-Term Lived Experience Engagement

A Practical Guide

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Introduction

Our approach

People with lived experience are at the heart of Justlife. Their insight shapes our decisions, our services, and our influencing work. We are committed to meaningful involvement, not as an add-on, but as a core way of understanding systems, challenging injustice, and creating change grounded in real lives.

Purpose of this guidance

This practical guide sets out key considerations for involving people with lived experience in short-term or one-off projects. It is designed to support safe, ethical, meaningful, and supportive engagement, even when time is limited.

Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is for stakeholders who are planning to work with anyone with lived experience on a short-term or one-off basis.

Short-term and one-off engagement

At Justlife, we often work collaboratively over a long period of time on projects such as [Common Ambition](#), [Peer Research](#), and [Temporary Accommodation Action Groups \(TAAGs\)](#), building relationships through sustained engagement.

However, there are also times when work is delivered over shorter periods, such as through sprints or structured engagement sessions. Alongside this, staff may draw on more ad hoc or one-off input from people with lived experience. This may include involvement in interview panels, participation in research, contributing to media activity, acting as guest speakers or providing input on consultations. This is not an exhaustive list, and other approaches may be appropriate depending on the context, aims of the work, and the individuals involved.

Why is this guidance needed?

This guide has been developed in response to an identified gap in guidance relating to short-term and one-off lived experience involvement. While many of our existing approaches focus on longer-term participation and relationship-building, this guidance aims to replicate our safe, ethical, and meaningful engagement within shorter-term contexts.

How to use this guidance

This document is designed to be used flexibly alongside existing organisational policies and sector guidance. It is supported by the following key policies and frameworks:

- [Introduction to Lived Experience](#)
- [Ethical Principles for Lived Experience Participation](#)
- [Lived Experience Payment Policy and Guidance](#)
- Lived Experience Recruitment and Engagement Framework
- [Research Ethics Policy](#)

For further reading on lived experience involvement, please see our [Lived Experience Padlet](#), which brings together resources from across the sector in one place. The resources are organised into different themes and explore a range of topics related to lived experience involvement.

Contact Us

Feel free to reach out and schedule a chat with our Lived Experience and Participation Team if you want to discuss anything in more detail or have any suggestions for further guidance!

We're also here to help if you are about to undertake lived experience work, but don't feel the type of work you'll be doing is covered here.

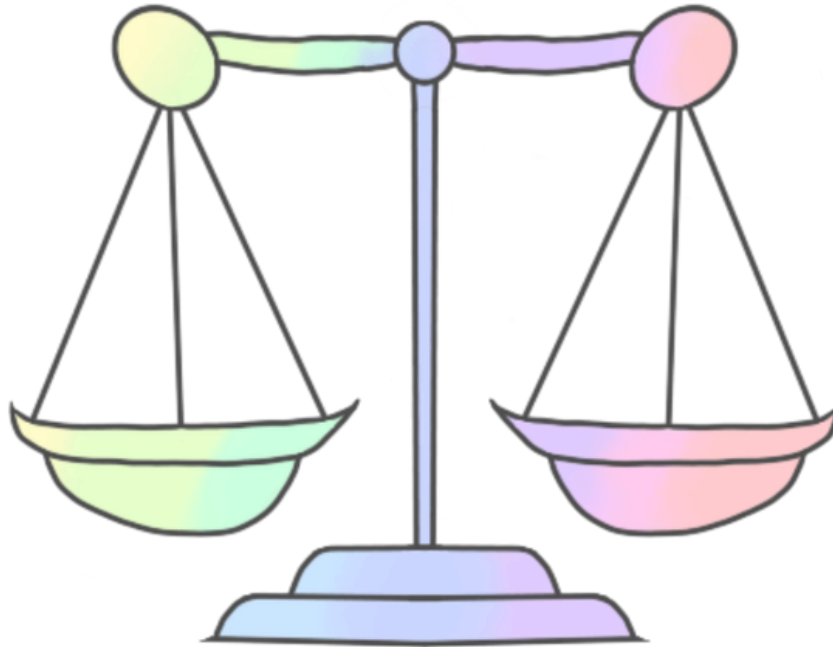


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Principles for Lived Experience Participation



These principles build on Justlife's wider Lived Experience Ethical Principles, as well as learning from Peer Research and Common Ambition, and have been specifically adapted for short-term engagement.

1 Being wise with time

Even when projects are short-term, or involvement is a one-off, engagement should ideally be planned well in advance. Last-minute invitations or nominations should be avoided wherever possible, as they can place pressure on people to participate and on staff to identify nominees, and may risk creating harmful or extractive dynamics.

2 Trust and Relationship building

In short-term or one-off projects, there may be limited time to build relationships. In these contexts, trust should be supported through clear, consistent, and respectful practice. This includes being transparent, following through on commitments, respecting boundaries, and being mindful of power imbalances.

3 Transparency and Accountability

Clearly communicate, in a timely manner, the purpose, expectations, and outcomes of all lived experience involvement activities, and update people on the impact of their contributions in a format that works for them. Ensure that participants have access to all policies underpinning their involvement, a clear role description, and have staff contact before their engagement to ensure they understand their role and the policies attached to it.

4 Meaningful engagement

Avoid superficial or symbolic gestures of inclusion: involve individuals meaningfully by ensuring their input influences decisions, policies, and practices to an appropriate level and crediting their work and contribution where possible. Be open and clear about the extent and limits of participants' influence and power within their role. Compensate participants fairly for their time, expertise, and contributions.

5 Choice and Control

People should be supported to exercise meaningful choice and control over their involvement at every stage of engagement, recognising that autonomy is central to safety, particularly for people who have experienced trauma or marginalisation. This is supported by ensuring people have genuine opportunities to make decisions about their participation, including what they take part in, how, and to what extent. Even when engagement is brief, a person-centred approach that values people's experiences and perspectives remains essential.

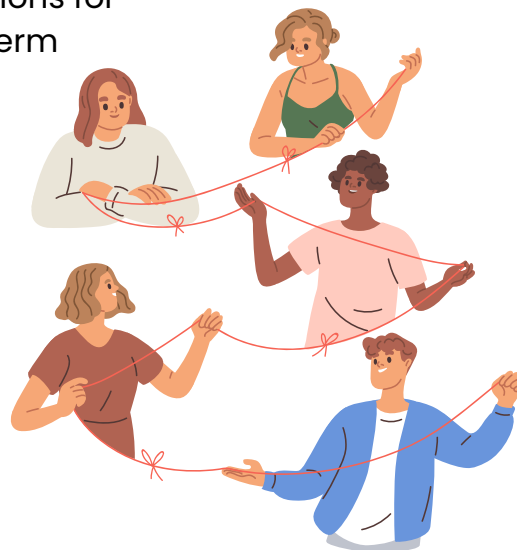
6 Psychological Safety

Create environments where participants feel safe to participate without pressure to share personal stories, or fear of judgment or harm. Incorporate practices such as trauma-informed approaches, psychological safety, and emotional support. Projects should plan for how participation begins, continues, and ends. To ensure psychologically safe “good endings,” consider how trauma or mental health triggers may heighten emotions during transitions. For projects with a set delivery timescale, establish and communicate end dates from the start, with an ending period designed to support participants' well-being.

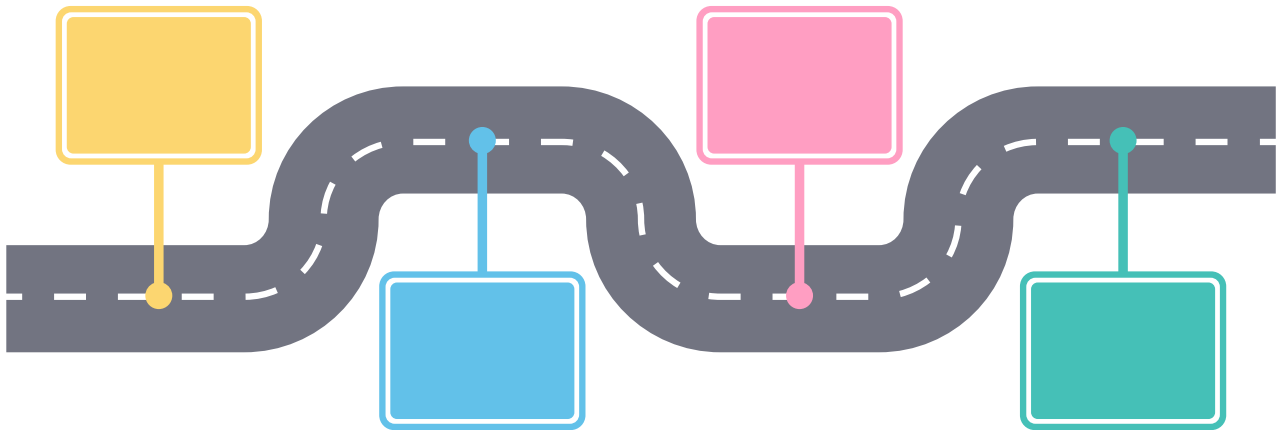
7 Ethical Data Use

People should give informed consent for how any information they share is used, including quotes, images, recordings, or personal stories. Consent should be specific, clearly explained, and separate from agreement to take part. People should also be able to revisit or withdraw consent where possible, particularly in relation to identifiable or published material.

The ethical principles above provide the foundation for how we approach lived experience participation at Justlife. The following guidance sets out practical considerations for supporting safe, meaningful, and ethical short-term engagement



Planning and Delivering Short-Term Lived Experience Engagement



1. Preparing for involvement

Participation Information Pack

Your participant information pack should provide a clear overview of the project, including its purpose, aims, who will be involved, the type of involvement, how long the involvement is expected to last, and how the role contributes to the wider work. Where relevant, brief examples of project impact can help to build trust and help manage expectations. The level of detail should be proportionate to the scope and duration of the project, while still ensuring people have the information they need to participate safely and meaningfully.

Role Description

Develop a [role description](#) that clearly outlines the purpose of the role, which can follow the 'traditional' format of role descriptions. Include details of the support available, accessibility considerations, and the [benefits of participation, such as CV development and transferable soft skills](#).

Introductory Conversation

People should be given the opportunity to meet with you, or with a trusted person they already have an existing relationship with who is also involved in the project, before starting the role. You could also offer people the option to bring someone with them, such as a support worker or someone they have previously worked with at Justlife. This can be an important step in building trust, supporting accessibility, and helping people feel safe and comfortable from the outset.

This should be a two-way conversation that shares clear information about the project, including what participation entails, expectations, available support, payment, expenses, and other benefits. This enables people to make an informed decision about whether the opportunity is right for them.

It is also an opportunity to understand a person's lived experience, readiness to participate, and motivations for taking part, which will vary and should not be assumed.

Before joining the project, you should also cover the role description, level of support, project boundaries, organisational expectations, length of involvement, and what ending participation will look like. Practical points should also be discussed, including staff absence cover and access to additional support where needed. It's important you emphasise the fact that it is legal to receive one-off payments for participation, but also discuss the potential DWP implications of payment.

Using a consistent set of questions helps ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to take part and supports transparency. You may also want to share questions in advance to give people time to reflect and think things through in their own time.





Informed consent

Consent and data protection mean ensuring people understand what they are agreeing to, how their information will be used, and what rights they have over their data. Because lived experience work might involve sharing personal stories or sensitive information, extra care should be taken to ensure trust, confidentiality, and clarity throughout the process.

Consent should be gained through an appropriate process, such as a consent form or participation agreement, depending on the nature and level of involvement. Information should be shared in accessible language and formats.

Consent is an ongoing process rather than a one-off event, especially if the work evolves or someone begins participating in one project before moving on to another. It should never be assumed that people's consent in one area of work will be the same in another. Check in with people throughout involvement, and ensure that other staff do the same if there is a handover from one project to another.

Data storage and confidentiality

Personal information such as people's full names, contact details, or case notes, and participation data should be stored securely on the Justlife server (and/or Inform if your project uses it and you are providing support work in addition to participation), and only accessed by those who need it for the purpose of the work. Explain clearly what information will be collected and why, where it will be stored, who can access it, and how long it will be retained. Any sharing of information should follow relevant data protection requirements and organisational policies.

Participants should be clearly and accessibly informed of their rights over their data, including the right to access, amend, withdraw consent, or request erasure of personal information where appropriate. This is particularly the case when designing research or anything that collects data from participants. Please get in touch with Signe, our Research Lead, to discuss this further.



Discussing credit for participation

Crediting people for work they've been a part of is a vital way of recognising and valuing people's contributions. However, because named recognition can carry both benefits and risks, preferences should be discussed directly, and if possible, right at the start of their engagement.

People should have agency over whether and how they are acknowledged, particularly where involvement creates outputs such as reports, training, campaigns, or media. Discuss whether people would like to be credited and how this should appear. Options may include a full name, first name only, initials, a pseudonym, collective attribution, or anonymity. Preferences should be recorded and revisited where appropriate.

Agree whether preferences differ depending on context. For example, someone may be comfortable being named internally but prefer anonymity in public reports, media, or online content. These distinctions should be clearly discussed and documented.

Just like consent, ongoing credit should never be assumed, and where possible, people should be able to change their preferences over time. Confirm permission before publishing names, stories, quotes, or identifying details, particularly where this may affect privacy, safety, wellbeing, benefits, employment, or housing.

It is also important that people understand that we can only redact their credit to a certain point – be clear that once something is in the public domain (for example, a quote on a published report), we then have no control over who reads it or how widely shared it might be.



2. Supporting participation

Accessibility

Accessibility means identifying and removing barriers so that everyone can participate on an equal and person-centred basis. Because many barriers are not immediately visible, it is important to consult people directly and understand what adjustments are needed to support full participation.

All engagement processes should consider the following aspects of accessibility:

- **Sensory Accessibility:** Provide quiet spaces, softer lighting and sensory toys to minimise overstimulation.
- **Digital Accessibility:** Use user-friendly platforms with assistive technology options where possible.
- **Physical Accessibility:** Select venues that cater to the needs of people with different needs, including reduced mobility and hearing.
- **Psychological Accessibility:** Use psychologically informed ways of working and consider what level of support people will need and what support you can offer.
- **Logistical accessibility:** Consider practical barriers to participation, such as travel, childcare, and scheduling.
- **Cultural accessibility:** Use inclusive and anti-racist practices that respect different cultures and contexts. Consider safety, belonging, and inclusion when planning engagement, including culturally sensitive scheduling, multilingual materials, interpreters, and appropriate food options (e.g. halal or kosher).





Safety and Support

You should carefully consider what level of support you are able to provide and make this clear to people from the outset.

One-to-one meetings should be offered as a private and supportive space for people to share thoughts, feelings, and concerns they may not feel comfortable raising in a group setting. They also allow staff to identify and respond early to any well-being concerns. People should be able to choose where these sessions take place to support trust, accessibility, and safety.

One-to-one support can be offered before, during, and after involvement. Pre-involvement support can help people prepare and address concerns. During participation, staff should provide trauma-informed support and be available to step out with someone if needed. Post-participation follow-ups can help people process their experience and may include debriefs, signposting, and referrals to further support where appropriate.

3. Lived Experience Payment

People with lived experience should be fairly compensated for their time, knowledge, and contributions in line with the [Justlife Lived Experience Payment Policy](#).

Claims should be paid as soon as possible, clearly communicated, and agreed with people when this will be.



4. Concluding Involvement

Communication during and after involvement

People should be kept informed about project progress and the impact of their involvement. This should include how and when they will receive updates, agreed at the start of the project, so expectations are clear. Updates may include how their input has informed the work, where findings have been shared, any developments, and the wider impact of the project. Where relevant, this may also include sharing drafts of reports or outputs for comment or agreement before they are finalised.

Supporting good endings

It is important to plan and discuss how people will be supported to exit the project well, both practically and emotionally.

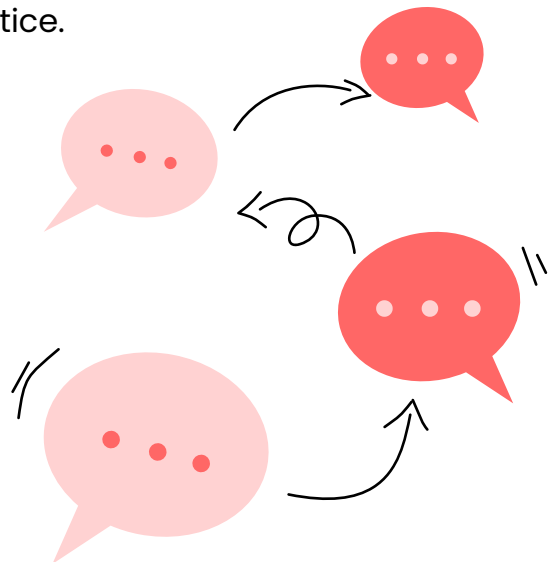
This includes considering any next steps or future opportunities that may be available, whether within Justlife (such as other projects or roles) or externally.

Ending templates can be found in our Lived experience project resources folder, and resources about how to support someone in a psychologically informed way through planned endings can be found on our [lived experience padlet](#).

Where appropriate, you may also wish to ask if they would like to be added to the Justlife lived experience mailing list to hear about future opportunities. To arrange this, contact Gail@justlife.org.uk.

Reflection and learning

You should also build in processes for participant reflection and feedback, such as through an exit interview, questionnaire or final reflective session. This not only enables us to listen to people and better support them, but also ensures we continue learning and improving our practice.



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