



Best practice principles:  
Engaging people with lived  
and living experience

Domestic, Family and Sexual  
Violence Commission

2023

# Introduction

The following best practice framework for engaging people with lived and living experience was developed as part of a broader research project undertaken for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission between March-July 2023. Over 123 people were consulted, including:

- 35 people with lived and living experience from across the country (spanning young people, people with disability, people with experience of incarceration, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, multicultural communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples)
- 70 people who work in the women's safety sector (frontline services, peak bodies, academic and government stakeholders)
- 18 members of the general public.

These consultations were supported by a literature review.

Where *to* gratefully acknowledge all those who invested their time, energy and wisdom in this project, including the following survivor advocates who requested to be named as contributors: : the Founding members of the Independent Collective of Survivors, Emily Paul, Lived Experience Advocate and Youth Advisor, Therese Dante Casanova and the Flat Out Collective

## Key findings

### The need for a multi layered approach to engagement

Both across and within these very different population cohorts, there were varied levels of interest in engaging with opportunities to shape government policy and provide feedback on service system experiences. Survivor advocates and others in the women's safety sector were most likely to 'reach in' to engage as long as the opportunities to do so are clearly communicated, accessible, relevant, and safe. However, this research suggests that there are many others in the community who are not currently connected into the policy and advocacy landscape but have a valuable role to play in shaping their direction.

In our research we found that people with lived and living experience were not always aware of opportunities to engage and often faced barriers to providing feedback. For those in crisis or survival mode, getting through each day was likely to take priority over 'having a say' about systems and policies—especially if they have doubts that speaking up will make a difference to their life or the lives of others. Providing feedback about service experiences could also feel very risky – particularly if people had concerns that doing so could make their situation worse (such as being denied further help or attracting unwanted attention from child protection). People who face these or other barriers to providing input, or are less likely to 'lean in', need to be appropriately resourced and supported to engage meaningfully with government and the sector.

Extending the diversity of voices that inform service and policy can partly be achieved by ensuring that representation on advisory bodies is intersectional and reflects a wide range of voices, including those who are less often heard. However, it also requires other 'ways in' that are safe, inclusive and accessible. Taking investment approach to engagement that focuses on building and maintaining relationships over time and extending the capability and capacity of the broader community to provide input is strongly recommended.

Consulting with people from diverse backgrounds as well as diverse interests and experiences will help ensure input from across the population. This will be important for equity, but also for innovation – it can

be harder for those embedded in the status quo to see where change is possible.

## Best practice principles for engagement

The literature review and consultations identified a number of best practice principles for engaging with people with lived and living experience.

Inclusive and accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplifying language and concepts and defining these where required</li> <li>• Translation and interpreting information (including into Auslan)</li> <li>• Using accessibility techniques (such as closed captions and WCAG 2.0 compatible formatting)</li> <li>• Promoting opportunities through a range of channels to suit diverse audiences</li> <li>• Offering options for how people take part (i.e. in person or online, ongoing or one-off, options to contribute anonymously or for contributions to be acknowledged publicly, etc.)</li> <li>• Providing people with adequate time to prepare and respond</li> </ul>
Emotionally and culturally safe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allowing people to decide for themselves what constitutes 'lived experience', and not excluding people due to fears about their vulnerability</li> <li>• Being transparent about what the aim of the engagement is, what feedback will be used for, and what post engagement follow up will be involved</li> <li>• Ensuring anonymity and/or confidentiality where this is requested</li> <li>• Following cultural protocols for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural communities</li> <li>• Not asking victim survivors to retell their stories</li> <li>• Providing trauma informed support before, during and after engagement; facilitators and support staff are appropriately trained</li> <li>• Ensuring follow through on the engagement, to show how input is leading to change</li> <li>• Addressing the power imbalance: where equal power sharing is not possible, the imbalance needs to be acknowledged to minimise risk of further harm</li> </ul>
Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating how engagements are relevant to and have benefits for potential participants</li> <li>• Ensuring engagements are focused - not addressing all the issues at once</li> <li>• Tailoring engagements to reflect the priorities of participants</li> </ul>
Encourages diverse views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring that representation on advisory bodies is intersectional</li> <li>• Developing deep understanding about diverse population groups,</li> <li>• Building trusting and collaborative relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multi-cultural communities</li> <li>• Tailoring engagements for specific groups</li> <li>• Building capacity and capability to engage through coaching, tailored briefings, and providing practical support to engage as needed (e.g. transport, child minding, remuneration etc). NB best practice involves asking people what, if any, support they require to engage.</li> </ul>