



# Lived experience in policymaking guide

Reflections on the principles, behaviours, and mindsets that underpin lived experience work

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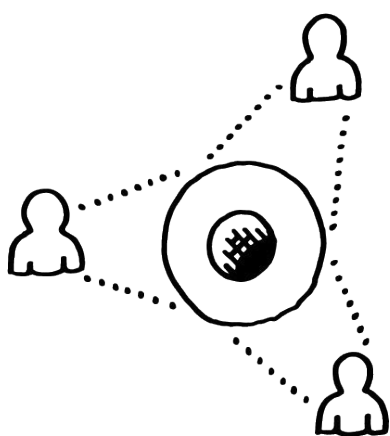
This short guide aims to draw out the principles, behaviours and mindsets, that underpin lived experience work. Lived experience refers to knowledge acquired through direct, first-hand and personal experience. In policymaking this usually refers to people with personal experience who interact with a policy in their daily lives.

Lived experience is an important part of policymaking, because it helps us to root policy decisions in real life experiences, ensuring a diversity of perspectives are considered and allowing for new ideas to emerge. However, we know it is important to get this work right or it can be or feel extractive.

# Context setting: Reflections from lived experience work

This guide is based on Policy Lab's 10 years of facilitating lived experience work, as well as our recent project for the [Changing Futures](#) programme in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). In partnership with DLUHC, we explored the question "How can we ensure that central government enables flexible and person-centred frontline delivery models on an ongoing basis for people facing multiple disadvantage?"

People facing multiple disadvantage experience combinations of homelessness, substance misuse, mental health issues, domestic abuse and contact with the criminal justice system, and so are likely to interact with multiple services and professionals at the same time. We worked with a group of 10 people with lived experience of multiple disadvantage, known as the National Expert Citizen Group. The group's involvement in Changing Futures work was facilitated by charity Revolving Doors, a national charity with 30 years' experience working to improve systems for people in the revolving doors of crisis and crime.



The National Expert Citizen Group with lived experience joined co-design workshops and met regularly with Policy Lab to shape the ethnography and systems change work. This process meant our understanding of the current system, and our ideas for change, were rooted in real life experiences and needs. You can read more about the wider Policy Lab project [here](#).

Following the project, we brought together people from the lived experience group and Revolving Doors to reflect on what makes lived experience work effective. We've combined these reflections with our own experience facilitating lived experience work in policymaking. You can hear suggestions from lived experience group members and Revolving Doors staff, in audio clips included throughout this guide.

## Principles for lived experience work

### 1. Be yourself

It can be helpful to find points of shared interest as well as points of difference. Be personable and genuine, when working with people with lived experience, rather than presenting a professionalised or clinical version of yourself. This can help conversations to feel more honest and realistic. While it is important to establish clear boundaries, to create clarity and manage expectations, it is also possible to be human and authentic within the relationship.

### 2. Practice active listening and postpone judgement

Listen and try to really pick up on what message people are trying to share. We use techniques like playing back what people say to show we have listened. Being actively curious and asking questions about 'why' and 'how', can help us to reach a better understand of people's experiences. The aim is not always to reach an answer or produce an outcome straight away, but to really immerse and receive what someone wants to share.

***"I did a project before and it was ongoing for 6 months. In those 6 months we met each other numerous times and we built up trust. We had mutual respect for each other because we actually knew each other. We were telling stories and we got that trust between each other. When you're in a collective and you've got that time to get to know each other and value them for who they really are it makes a lot of difference."***

Sarah, NECG Member

### 3. Be open about what you might learn

Widen understanding of what 'counts' as valuable information. Some of the best insights can come from outside of direct or specific questions. We recommend leaving time for open and fluid conversation, to appreciate the person's whole environment.

### 4. Give people time to prepare

If you are inviting people into a policymaking space, it can be an intimidating environment to enter. All of us need time to adjust and prepare for the policy challenge at hand. Make sure to give people the information and time to familiarise with the question at hand and scan your language to avoid overly jargonistic expressions. Additionally, if you are asking people to contribute personal experiences within this environment, be mindful of what this might feel like for people and make steps to ensure people feel comfortable.

### 5. Remind people that they are valued

Set up each conversation by reminding people that their experiences, knowledge and perspectives are important. This can help to set the right tone for conversations and lead to more honest and open conversations. Remind people that their views count, no matter how different they are. The language of 'roles' can be helpful for reiterating that everyone has different but unique parts to play. Perhaps some people might bring knowledge of the policy landscape, while others might be able to contextualise a policy in the history of what support or service was previously in place. Other people might be sharing their own direct experience. Lean into the strengths of diverse perspectives.

### 6. Provide opportunities for people to see the impact of their contribution

We need to be transparent about how insights will be used and the scale of change at play. Wherever possible, bringing people with lived experience together with policy decision-makers maximises the benefits of the experience for everyone. It is important to provide updates once a piece of work is over, so that people know what their personal experiences have fed into.

### 7. Fight the fear and do it anyway

Time and again, we've heard a real appetite for working with people with lived experience from policymakers across government, but a lack of time, capability and confidence in knowing how to do so. We find it useful to remember that we are also people with "lived experience" of various issues, and that we too would have various views if given the opportunity to contribute.

**Robin, NECG member, explains the value of creating a community.**



[Click for audio](#)



***"It was nice to know that I was being listened to because like I said not everyone listens to you... It was nice that you took my views on board. I really appreciated that."***

Leah, NECG Member

**Robin, NECG member, describes respecting people in lived experience work.**



[Click for audio](#)

**Sean, Involvement Manager at Revolving Doors, describes overcoming 'fear.'**



[Click for audio](#)

# Practical considerations

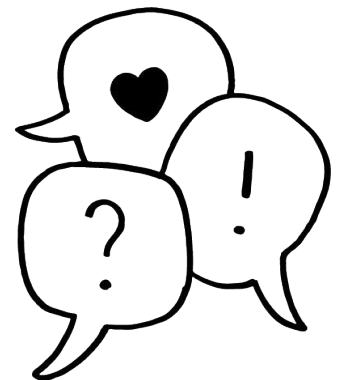
Alongside these principles here is a shortlist of some key practices for carrying out lived experience work.

- **Consider commissioning a professional lived experience group**, who are established, well supported and who can work with people to make sure they are practically and psychologically cared for before, during and after the work.
- **Ensure that you are thanking people** for their time through vouchers or equivalent.
- **Reimburse people** for things like travel costs, so that there are no practical barriers to entry and consider the timing of events and engagement. Often out of hours engagement and events attract more diverse participation.
- **Where possible, share outputs** from the project with people who have participated.
- **Consider what else you can give back** and what people can get out of the experience, for example exposure to policymaking, being in an office environment, or public speaking at workshops and meetings.
- **Make time to prepare people for taking part.** This could include creating or sharing resources, in person or online briefings, and in person or online debriefings.
- **Where possible, be flexible and create options** for how people can share their views. Everyone has different needs, so the best way to cater for this can be to offer different ways to take part.
- **If you are running workshops, find ways to spend time “in between times”** with people who have lived experiences and perspectives. Snack and lunch breaks, and moments in between formal sessions, are the times to get to know people better.

## Final thoughts

We want to thank members from the lived experience group (the NECG), and Revolving Doors Agency, for the crucial role they played in the Changing Futures project, and for sharing their insights on what makes this kind of work effective.

As policymakers, we’ve seen the direct benefits of bringing people with lived experience and policy professionals together, elevating the quality of decision-making and understanding about the issues. We hope that these reflections help others to reap the same rewards.



### For further information:

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### Acknowledgements

This lived experience guide was designed by Policy Lab in partnership with people with lived experience, policymakers and sector experts from across England, living and working at multiple levels and across regional systems. We would like to thank: representatives from Changing Futures in DLUHC, Revolving Doors Agency and the National Expert Citizens Group for contributions in developing this.

We are sharing this work in the spirit of enabling broader input and development. We welcome feedback and suggestions.