

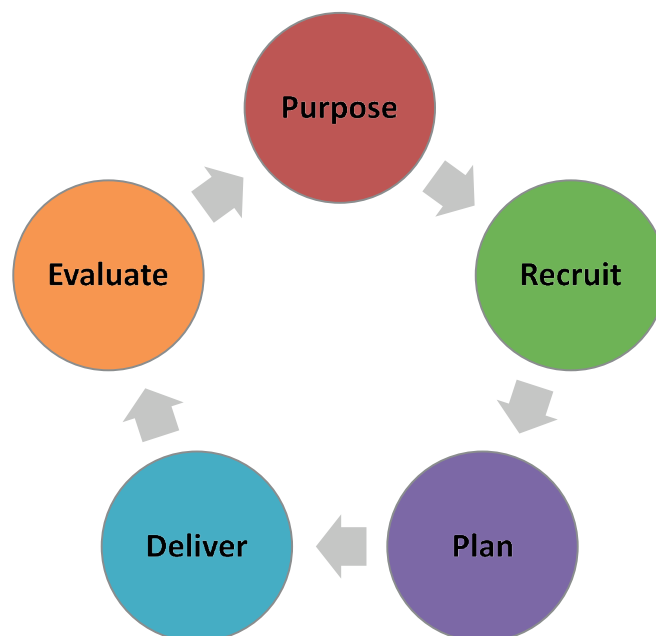
Factsheet #3:

The Participation Process

At all levels, good quality participation must be well planned, with clear aims, objectives and outcomes. As with any task or project, participation has defined stages of planning, delivery and evaluation; we call this a Participation Process.

A good participatory process must be well embedded within the systems and organisation it supports. A participation process that is properly supported and developed will deliver meaningful engagement, and in turn, significantly better results. The participation process can be visually represented by the diagram below (fig. 1). By using this participation cycle, professionals ensure that engagement with young people is meaningful, impactful and relevant. Each phase is equally important, and should be considered thoroughly before moving on to the next.

Figure 1: The Participation Process



Purpose

A clearly defined purpose is the starting point of all effective participatory activities. A good purpose will focus on the outputs and outcomes for both organisation and young people. Identifying your specific purpose(s) ensures that there is a shared understanding of why young people will be included, which informs the recruitment and planning stages, meaning that resources are used efficiently to achieve the desired outcome. It also ensures that young people have an understanding of their role in the broader project, and that their input is used effectively and meaningfully.

Recruit

Who do you want to involve and where are you recruiting them from? When engaging with children and young people you will have to be proactive in seeking them out. You will have to reach out to them, and evidence how the issues and/or services you are discussing is relevant to their lives.

You may be aware of existing participation networks or groups of young people. At other times you will need to do some research and get creative! Some key questions to think about:

- What about those who are seldom heard or less engaged?
- How will you plan for the specific needs of children and young people in your local area?
- What do you need to consider when engaging with different groups of children and young people?

Not all participation opportunities will be relevant to all children and young people. Establishing whose perspectives will be most informative will make recruitment easier, helping you to reach out to relevant demographics.

A method for acquiring informed consent should be put in place, and next steps for engagement should be identified.

NOTE: Selective recruitment should not be understood as a justification for only engaging with the most accessible and most capable. All young people have the right to have their voices heard.

Plan

Good planning takes time, so ensure your timelines are sufficient. Include thinking about logistics and materials, as well as practicalities such as capacity and resources. Planning should not only also take into account appropriate delivery methods, but also the environment and access requirements needed to support each young person's involvement. Young people themselves are best placed to make recommendations for this, although there may be some situations where consulting an adult supporter for additional information is appropriate.



Successful activities will vary depending on the young people involved, and should be suited to the young people's capacities. For example, one young person might prefer to work independently whereas other young people might get the most out of working collaboratively in a group setting. Both forms of engagement are equally valuable. Activities should be engaging, relatable and time-dependent, and always ensure you build in time for participants to process information and requests, and then to respond.

There are many useful toolkits available online and in print for engaging participation activities.

Deliver

Identifying the right person(s) to deliver the activity is key. It may or may not be appropriate for it to be facilitated by somebody already known to the young people, but regardless of their relationship the facilitator should be engaging, encouraging, have knowledge of the issues to be explored, and able to create an open, respectful environment.

Delivery should begin with an explanation of the purpose of the activity, followed by acquiring informed consent (if not acquired beforehand). The activity should end with informing the young people of what will happen next with their information.

Delivery is a flexible process. Many factors, including support needs, environment or energy levels, impact on young people's engagement. The facilitator should be prepared to adapt their activities or setting as necessary.

Your activities should cover a range of engagement methods in order to appeal to different young people's skills and preferences, e.g. group discussions, individual tasks, activities that support sitting or moving around, and creative sessions. Delivering activities that cover a range of styles and engagement methods will help young people to stay energised, motivated and focused.



Evaluate

What difference has involving children and young people made? Think about what your primary and secondary outcomes were. Have you achieved them and would altering your planning and delivery have improved how and when they were achieved?

As well as evaluating the engagement of the participants, the outputs and the outcomes which the participatory activity is contributing towards, it is important to evaluate the participation process itself. Include young people as well as colleagues in evaluating each stage of the cycle.

Participation brings with it its own inherent long-term benefits, and young people should be able to identify what they have got from their involvement. Soft skills such as building confidence and self-esteem, team-working abilities and communication skills, are as equally valuable as formal qualifications.

You will need to identify how you will take your learning forward to ensure participation continues as a viable and valuable resource.

Just a thought!

Although it is likely that the Delivery phase of the participation process will contain the majority of your engagement with young people, there may also be plenty of opportunity to work with young people during the other stages of the cycle.

Where appropriate, young people can be meaningfully involved in establishing the purpose, making plans for supporting recruitment, planning the main participatory activities, delivering these activities, and evaluating the process once it is complete.

The more input young people have, the more responsive, effective and youth- and disability-friendly – and reflective of their experiences – the project will be.

Take a look at **Factsheet #1: Methods and Levels of Participation**, and **Factsheet #4: Barriers to Participation** for more information.



This resource is part of the Making Participation Work programme, a joint partnership between the Council for Disabled Children and KIDS, and funded by the Department for Education. For more information about the Making Participation Work programme, visit us at <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/our-work/participation/practice/making-participation-work>



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