

# BHCA's co-production workshops, meetings and event guidance

## Overview

BHCA has developed this guidance for services and commissioners, to enable effective discussions and collaborative workshops in co-production spaces. By this, we mean spaces where service users and/or people with lived experience of homelessness and come together with service providers and commissioners to collaborate around system or service improvement.

This has been developed using feedback provided by the BHCA lived experience steering group who have hosted and attended workshops, presentations and feedback events across Brighton and Hove.

## Key Points

There are some important points to establish from the outset:

- This is going to feel different to 'regular' meetings
- This is, for most, a new way of working
- You may have to adapt/be flexible with your communication and working style
- Co-production is not about extracting information from people with lived experience, or asking to sign off on already created proposals/design/policy. It is about balancing the power between services and systems and those accessing them. It is supporting people with experience to have a voice and be involved in every step of the process you are about to embark on.
- Let go of any preconceived ideas and stereotyping. Expect to have your expectations challenged

## Engaging with co-production

As a project, we are often approached to support services who are keen or required to engage people with lived experience in their work. We often hear the term '**Using** lived experience/*this group/BHCA*' - please ensure that this is phrased more like, *working together with people with lived experience/The Brighton and Hove Common Ambition Steering Group*.

Co-production can be interpreted in many ways. For BHCA, it is about balancing out power dynamics and creating and valuing equal voice. It incorporates strengths-based working; understanding that everyone has different skills and experience and respecting the positive impact this can have. Please remember there are things you can't see, that only people with lived experience can and co-production is essential if genuine impact on health inequalities is to be achieved.

Reciprocity is a key foundation in co-production. How will you ensure that you value the individuals with lived experience that you are engaging?

## **Before the event**

The work will often start before you enter the room. In order to make sure the event is collaborative, safe and effective please ensure:

- You understand the purpose of the event, if this is not clear ask the organisers
- You have read all documents and/or instructions provided before coming into the room. For example, BHCA has a welcoming visitors document, this provides non group members with instructions for the meeting
- If you are a team leader or managing the event please ensure your staff understand the purpose of the event and have undertaken all pre reading.

If you are hosting the meeting, it is vital that the venue you have booked is fully accessible, this includes:

- Lifts if the venue is not on the ground floor
- An easily accessible outside space for breaks
- Being centrally located and on a bus route
- Privacy, so those who are not invited cannot hear conversations and there is no outside noise making it difficult to concentrate
- An additional room, a private space that only those with lived experience and support staff can access, for example a breakout room in the same building

## **During the event**

### **Communication and language**

This will be unlike your usual work meetings, you will likely need to adjust the language you use and the way you communicate.

You will need to ensure you use language that everyone can understand. Please do not use acronyms in documents or during discussions. It may be everyday language to you, but for those not working in your department, it will not be clear or obvious what they stand for.

If there are terms that only members of your team will understand, please ensure these are explained or avoided in a co-production discussion space.

During breakout sessions or small group discussions, ensure it is inclusive. Has everyone at the table had time to speak and are they all being included in the discussion? It is vital for effective co-production that everyone has a say and is heard.

Be prepared to be challenged and please do not get defensive; we understand it may be difficult to hear what changes might be required to the way you work. By being open and receptive to feedback and new ideas, we can effectively co-produce improvements in the system and services, and achieve better outcomes for the people in our community

## Psychologically informed working

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure there is a safe working environment in meetings. Not only should the environment be accessible, but it must be safe, supported and without stigma and judgement. Experiencing health inequity and inequalities is a complex experience that is related to trauma and a trauma informed approach should be adopted.

During co-production meetings this includes:

- Ensuring the content of the discussion will not cause participants unnecessary emotional distress. If there are difficult topics to be discussed, make sure they come with a content warning, and please stop the discussion if you notice someone looking uncomfortable or in distress
- Ensuring presentations do not contain unnecessary emotive statistics, negative/stigmatising language or real life experiences of trauma
- Ensure that there are breakout spaces for people with lived experiences to use if they need a break from the meeting, and that these are not entered by others
- Remember that people are free to leave sessions if they want. Avoid drawing attention to anyone who leaves the room.
- **Not** asking participants personal questions, there is no need for this in a work environment.


## Who's in the room?

Please bear in mind that you might be in a workshop or group discussion with someone who has used your service or a service you have commissioned. This may be distressing for participants who have had bad experiences during this time. These are people's personal and direct lived experiences that must be respected and taken into account when planning presentations and breakout discussions.

If you are organising your own co-production event, remember there is strength in numbers. Ensure that there is more than one person with lived experience per breakout/discussion group.

## After the event

When working with co-production groups, it is important to remember that this is not an extractive process. The information you may gather here will likely be very valuable to your service or area of commissioning, but this does not mean you have permission to use it. Ideally, the collaborative work that is carried out in these is incorporated into service and system change, but it must be credited to those that carried out the work. These meetings are not the end to the conversation, but the beginning. In order to drive change, the next steps should also involve people with lived experience in the planning and delivery. You are accountable to the people you have been working with, and at the very least, this means asking for consent to use this information and coming back to the group to report your progress.



There may be resources that the co-production group has developed or resources that have been co-created in sessions. It is vital that you ask permission to use these resources and ensure whoever created them is credited.

Finally, It's important to remember that the people in the room with lived experience don't get to talk away from the inequalities that have been discussed after the event you must ensure optional follow up care and support is provided.

### **Examples of bad practice**

These are some examples of bad practice we have encountered:

- Personal questions about a person's background
- Discriminatory remarks about a person's background
- Project resources being criticised
- Staff being defensive when challenges or improvements were suggested by project members
- In small group discussion, staff members engaging in a discussion and not involving project members
- Project members feeling judged, isolated and labelled
- Project members feeling patronised and that there is an expectation that they do not understand the system and are not educated or intelligent
- Experience of people attending meetings with the expectation that this work will be at a lower level than their usual work and not taking it or the project members seriously.

Please avoid these practices at all costs. To ensure effective co-production and genuine system improvement, there must be respect for all parties involved. Remember that you never know what people in the room have experienced. Please be kind, avoid judgement and remember we are all learning.