Involving older people in decision making

At a Bristol Ageing Better partnership meeting in November 2018 we asked our partners to reflect on how older people are currently involved in the decisions made within their projects and organisations. We also asked them for their ideas about how this could be improved.

This Learning Digest presents all of these ideas. The hope is that this list will inspire other projects and organisations who are looking for new ideas in this area. After all, 50 heads are better than one!

Boards, steering groups or advisory committees

These could exist entirely of people aged 50+ or there could be an agreement that a certain percentage of members will be from this age group. Within an organisation, each individual project/service could have its own advisory group.

To enable them to be fully involved in the decision-making, remember to send any meeting documents in plenty of time for them to properly review them.

Recruiting staff, volunteers or trustees who are aged 50+

Recruiting these staff, volunteers or trustees by actively encouraging people from this age group to apply. For volunteers, regular meetings and a supportive supervisor can be key to ensuring their voice is heard within the project and they are able to actively contribute to decisions that are made.

Keeping these staff and volunteers informed about what is happening in the project and wider organisation, asking for their suggestions and ideas.

Surveys or questionnaires

Completed by those aged 50+ (either current participants/clients or by the public), publishing the results afterwards. This could be conducted at events, at community group meetings, via post, in magazines/newsletters, in GP surgeries or online.

While online surveys and polls will only reach a certain subsection of older people, it could still be one way to seek their input.

Informing and involving current participants

Ensuring the older people who are already involved in your project or organisation are kept informed and encouraged to participate in various forms of decision-making. For example monthly updates to volunteers, or information sessions to support members of your project steering group to find out about other projects run within your organisation. You could also hold focus groups or forum meetings with current participants, letting them know afterwards how you used their opinions or ideas to shape the project.

Informally asking participants for their feedback and ideas at the end of an activity, for example what they would like to see from future activities. This informal involvement can be an important way to involve people who would not join a formal steering group.

Consultation events or focus groups on a particular topic

These could be with members of the public or with specific communities you want to hear from.

When seeking specific communities to consult it may help to go through other existing local organisations, faith groups or older forums.

Face-to-face conversations with the community

Informal one-to-one conversations with members of the public aged 50+, for example in the street, at 'pop-up' events, door-knocking, at bus stops, hairdressers, supermarkets, chemists, takeaways, charity shops, pubs, betting shops or religious meeting places.

Thinking about whose voice you currently hear and trying to go to places you haven't previously tried in order to hear the voices of a diverse range of older people. These conversations could also be undertaken by older volunteers or local neighbours.

Supporting older people to take the lead on decisions

Facilitating and supporting older people in the community to co-create projects and lead activities they are interested in.

Similarly, facilitating older people to share their own stories, rather than these stories being told by organisations/projects on their behalf.

What decisions are older making within the BAB partnership?

Examples given at the November 2018 Bristol Ageing Better partnership meeting included ...

Recruitment panels

Feedback on an activity, project or event

Funding decisions

Project plans or strategies

Events

Marketing materials

Rebranding

How to reach other people aged 50+

Local community activities

Designing projects from scratch

Annual priorities or goal setting

Evaluation