Participant Input in Harm Reduction Programs

Building in space for participant input is an important part of harm reduction programs. Participant input can include involvement in services, program decisions, and leadership. Harm reduction programs have options for seeking participant input and sharing decision-making power. There is a range of formal feedback models that programs with more capacity might put in place:

- **Community committees** like Participant Advisory Boards
- **Feedback meetings** with food and stipends for participants who share their thoughts and time
- **Point in Time Surveys** with questions about participant experiences
- **Interviews** with participants about their goals for the program

There are also many informal, lower-burden ways to get feedback from program participants:

- **Conversations** with participants
- **Social media** comments and messages
- **Suggestion box** at a fixed site
- **Notes** on participant requests for supplies or services that the program doesn't currently offer

As you gather participant input, you will incorporate it into your program processes, services, and decisions. When doing this, it's important to share back the ways your participants' feedback impacts your program. You can share impacts through:

- **Signs** where participants will see them during encounters
- **Conversations** with participants
- **Social media** posts
- **Committee meetings** or other participant gatherings

Other important considerations for participant input:

- **Compensating participants for their time and expertise.** Programs implementing higher-burden or higher-commitment methods of participant feedback should especially consider what participants will receive in return.
- Employing people who use drugs in program leadership and staff positions. This helps center people who use drugs in decision-making and program activities. *(Note: see resources on next page for more considerations and processes for organizations employing people who use drugs)*
- **Some people may find themselves in dual roles as participants and workers.** This happens when programs employ people who use drugs in leadership, staff, and volunteer positions. Programs should value insight from people navigating tensions between program priorities and participant needs. Learning from these experiences can help improve services for everyone involved.
- **Participant safety, confidentiality, and privacy** should be key priorities in all feedback processes. To help foster your participant community's safety, you can:

  Hold meetings in safe spaces for the community.
  Secure a private space for participant interviews.
  Allow anonymous participant feedback.

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Resources for Participant Input

Spectrums of participant input

The Citizen's Handbook. "Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation." Accessed March 8, 2023. https://www.citizenshandbook.org/arnsteinsladder.html. *Arnstein's Ladder outlines a continuum of participation into three categories: Nonparticipation, Tokenism, and Citizen Control. Useful for thinking about power and decision-making.*

Miller, Kyle. "The View From Arnstein's Ladder: The Promise of Community Control." *American Planning Association: Uncovering JAPA* (blog), October 17, 2019. https://www.planning.org/blog/9187533/view-from-arnsteins-ladder-the-promise-of-community-control/. *Jane McAlevey is a labor organizer and scholar. She outlines three categories along a power-sharing continuum: Advocacy, Mobilizing, and Organizing. This resource compares McAlevey's continuum with Arnstein's Ladder.*

International Association for Public Participation. "IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation," 2018. https://www.iap2.org/page/pillars. *This continuum reflects the increased communication and resources required from programs and participants in decision making processes. Each level of the continuum (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, Empower) has its benefits and drawbacks.*

Building participant-driven harm reduction programs

International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD). "Injecting Drug User Implementation Tool Training Manual." International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD), October 1, 2019. https://inpud.net/launch-of-injecting-drug-user-implementation-tool-training-manual/. *This manual is designed to train facilitators of meetings among people building programs with and for people who use drugs. Pages 44-52 of this manual discuss training programs in community leadership in harm reduction services.*

Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU). "VANDU Manifesto," January 5, 2017. https://vandureplace.wordpress.com/research/vandu-manifesto/. *The VANDU Manifesto outlines key principles, demands, and actions for a drug-user-led liberation movement and includes basic criteria for drug-user-led organizations.*

Employing people who use drugs

Balian, Raffi, and Cheryl White. "Harm Reduction at Work: A Guide for Organizations Employing People Who Use Drugs." Harm Reduction Field Guide. Open Society Foundations International Harm Reduction Development Program, March 2011. https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/harm-reduction-work. T*his guide offers practical strategies and sample policies for employers seeking to foster an equitable workplace for employees who use drugs (and those who don't).*

National Harm Reduction Coalition. "Peer Delivered Syringe Exchange (PDSE) Toolkit." National Harm Reduction Coalition, August 31, 2020. https://harmreduction.org/issues/syringe-access/pdse-toolkit/. *This toolkit is written by people who work at syringe services programs in New York City and offers guidance, example policies, and practices. for starting and running a peer-delivered syringe services program.*

National Harm Reduction Coalition live training: "Supervising People Who Use Drugs." Available upon request to NHRC: training@harmreduction.org.

Conducting research with people who use drugs

These resources are specific to academic research partnerships with people who use drugs, but many of their guiding principles and techniques are useful for programs implementing participant input.

Drug Policy Alliance. "Recommendations for Community Driven Drug Policy Research." https://drive.google.com/file/d/10lBcJ-7JigbcHfaO_ur4zzxn86lNoED9/view, 2022. *This resource includes a wealth of guidance, examples, and expertise in community-driven harm reduction research, much of which can be adapted in implementing participant input.*

North Carolina Survivors Union. "Ethical Research Manifesto," 2020. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UFm5EYCCgr5Shv9TjOCobobF4JwI12i8uN98TV8Fr34/edit?usp=sharing. *This manifesto details principles and questions for researchers seeking to work with people who use drugs, many of which are applicable to programs seeking input from participants.*

Simon, Caty, Sarah Brothers, Knina Strichartz, Abby Coulter, Nick Voyles, Anna Herdlein, and Louise Vincent. "We Are the Researched, the Researchers, and the Discounted: The Experiences of Drug User Activists as Researchers." *International Journal of Drug Policy* 98 (December 1, 2021): 103364. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2021.103364. *The National Survivors Union developed a community-driven research process with elements that are useful for any feedback process in harm reduction.*