



The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox FAQ

Part of The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox by Collective Threads Initiative

Why is meaningful engagement of people with lived experience essential?.....	1
What is CTI's approach to meaningful engagement?.....	2
A lot of meaningful engagement initiatives I've seen focus on skill-building and opportunities for people with lived experience. Is that part of your framework?.....	5
How does CTI understand "belonging"?.....	5
What is The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox? How might someone use it?.....	6
What are some of the tools included?.....	6
Do participants need to be familiar with the framework before using the tools?.....	6
Can I access help when deciding which tools I need or when I am developing my plan?.....	6
Why should I evaluate my organisation's progress on meaningful engagement using these or other surveys?.....	7
I am a person with lived experience who works (or wants to work) on issues that impact me. Do you have resources available?.....	7

Why is meaningful engagement of people with lived experience essential?

Any time the majority of people making decisions about or developing solutions to an issue are not from the communities most impacted by those issues, their solutions will fall short. When the people directly impacted by an issue are integrated throughout the systems that address their issues – in leadership, in planning, in implementing, and in learning and [evaluation](#) – our work will be more sustainable and our solutions more relevant. The services we provide will be more accessible and meaningful. The policies we create will be better able to address the issue while minimising harmful impacts.

What is CTI's approach to meaningful engagement?

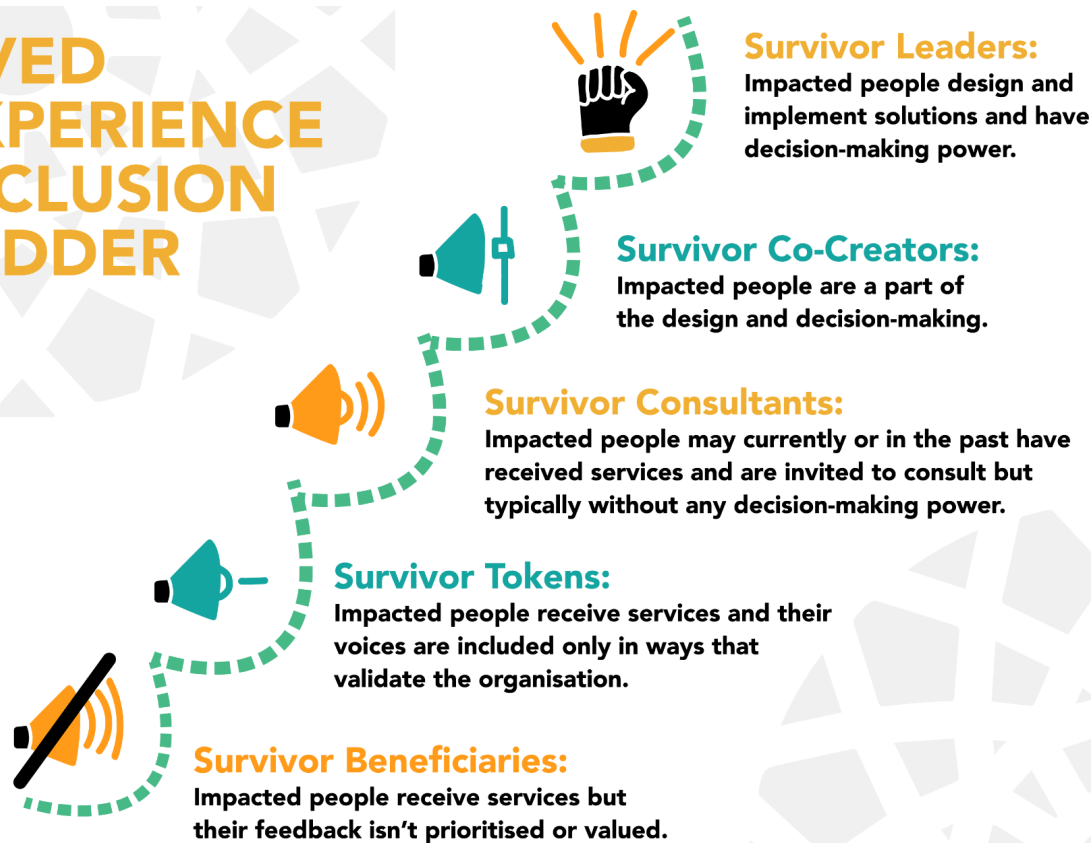
Our framework, which is outlined in greater detail in *The Meaningful Engagement Handbook*, outlines six levels of engagement that [people with lived experience](#) may have with organisations. These levels are outlined in the first element of our framework: The Lived Experience Engagement Spectrum:



It is important that people with lived experience are engaged thoughtfully at each level of the spectrum. Even organisations led by people with lived experience at the *Empower* level should also consider how well they are doing on *Inform* and *Ask*.

Organisations that have not typically had lived experience leadership may do well at the *Inform* or *Ask* level but should maintain a commitment to intentional improvement on other levels. This is reflected in the second element of our framework: The Lived Experience Inclusion Ladder.

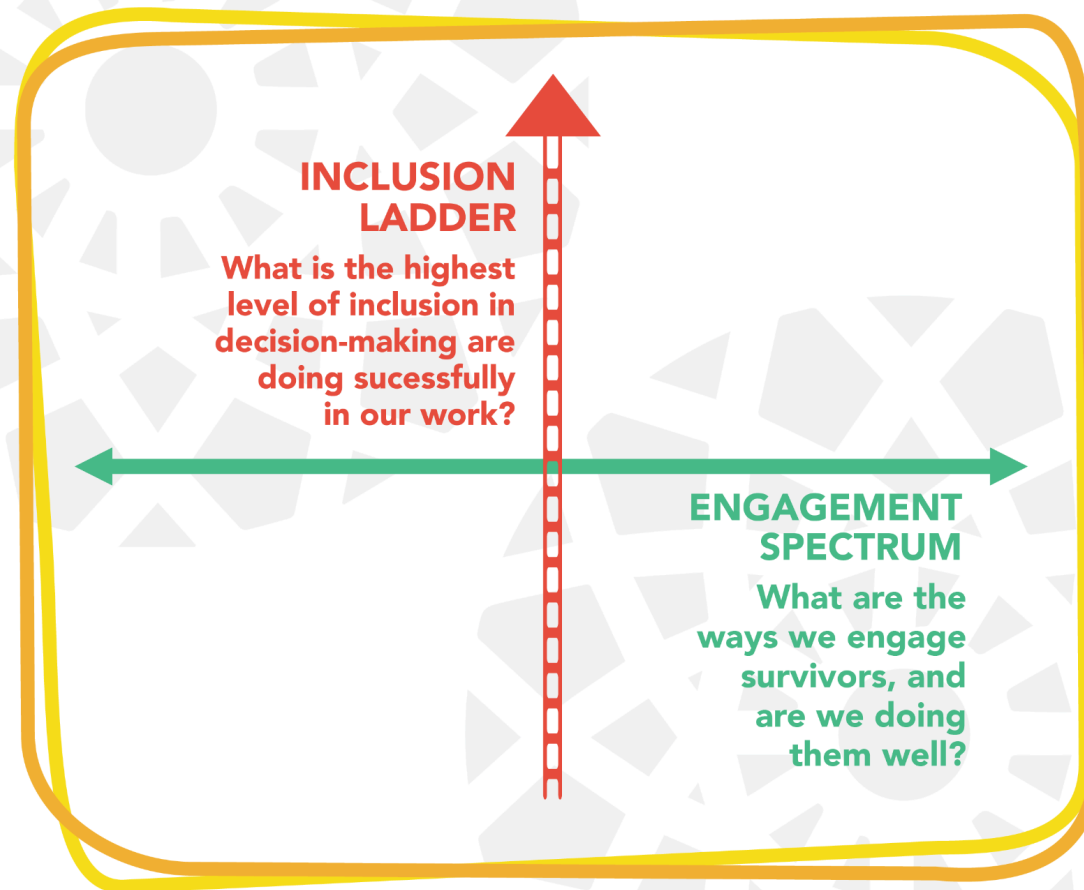
LIVED EXPERIENCE INCLUSION LADDER



Organisations can focus on strengthening their meaningful engagement practices at every level of the spectrum while intentionally striving to use the highest possible levels of engagement on any programme, project, or organisation.

This requires intentional reflection on [belonging](#), meaningful engagement, and [inclusion](#). The Meaningful Engagement Handbook provides concepts and strategies to inform and improve meaningful engagement within organisations.

Put together, the Lived Experience Engagement Spectrum and the Lived Experience Inclusion Ladder create a robust framework that expands the circle of belonging to everyone, fostering healthy [movements](#) and strong, community-centred organisations.



A lot of meaningful engagement initiatives I've seen focus on skill-building and opportunities for people with lived experience. Is that part of your framework?

Absolutely! [People with lived experience](#) have often been [marginalised](#) from access to safety, support, and [resources](#). This means that they may have had less access to formal education, professional development, or work experience in similar fields. Professional development and work opportunities for [impacted people](#) *is an essential part of* meaningful engagement.

In our experience (and the experience of the numerous people whose feedback has guided this work), even when impacted people have similar (or better) qualifications to their non-impacted colleagues, they are often still excluded from leadership, considered less qualified, or perceived as less competent or capable. **These impacts of bias cannot be removed by providing additional training or opportunities for people with lived experience.** They require ongoing commitment to learning about, reflecting on, and transforming the systemic, cultural, and organisational dynamics that perpetuate cycles of exclusion, prejudice, and invalidation. The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox includes numerous tools to support organisations in that process.

How does CTI understand “belonging”?

Belonging is a deep knowing and experience of being at home – in your body and in your social and physical environment. Belonging gives you the foundation to be able to thrive. Belonging happens only when there is [co-creation](#) and co-ownership. It is both a practice and a feeling: an ongoing practice of collaborative creation that results in a feeling of being seen, welcomed, and at ease. In a healthy [movement](#), everyone feels belonging. The movement centres [people with lived experience](#) while building collective power, and that means that *everyone* should belong. While the movement is “people with a shared experience of injustice” who organise for their collective power, our understanding of belonging without othering frames that [power](#) as “power with” rather than “power over.” This means that belonging is for everyone, centring impacted people but with belonging also accessible for those without lived experience.

What is The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox? How might someone use it?

The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox consists of two main parts: The Meaningful Engagement Handbook and the accompanying tools.

- The handbook outlines the history, theory, and practices that underpin the Collective Threads Initiative's approach.
- The rest of the tools in the Toolbox are various rubrics, assessments, and planning tools intended to support implementation. You will not need to use all tools, just as you would not need to eat every food on a buffet. Choose the ones that work best for your organisation and align best with your work.

What are some of the tools included?

You may view all the available tools at <https://collectivethreads.org/meaningfulengagement>. Development of new tools is an ongoing process and we are continually developing new tools with our partners in response to their needs.

Do participants need to be familiar with the framework before using the tools?

No. Many of the tools can be used by any organisation at any time. However, the framework explains the “why” for the tools, so we recommend that organizations have basic familiarity with the framework before editing or adapting the tools.

Can I access help when deciding which tools I need or when I am developing my plan?

Contact CTI to learn more about available support options. CTI has some resources directly available and may know of trained technical assistance providers in your region.

Why should I evaluate my organisation's progress on meaningful engagement using these or other surveys?

We measure what we value. Organisations may be expected to also measure things based on funder requirements, but beyond that **evaluation can provide a systematic process for measuring meaningful engagement with people with lived experience over time**. Evaluating your organisation's lived experience engagement strengths and areas for growth will help you assess how you are doing, determine a plan for continuous quality improvement, and track your progress over time.

Evaluation is often viewed by organisations as either a funder chore (“We do this to keep getting funded so we must look good to our funders”) or a scary task (“What if we don’t score well? Does that mean we’re bad at our work?”). In reality, your “score” is less important than what you do with the results of the assessment. The scores on the assessments and averages in your analysis do not tell you whether or not you are succeeding or failing, or whether or not you should be proud or ashamed. Rather, they give you information that you can use to have a more impactful strategy. The goal is not to compare yourself with other organisations – “Who scored higher? Does that mean they’re better than us?” The goal is to evaluate your own organisation, identify and prioritise follow-up actions, and develop a strategy for implementing changes. This is continual quality improvement, and demonstrating a commitment to CQI speaks volumes about the intentions of your work!

I am a person with lived experience who works (or wants to work) on issues that impact me. Do you have resources available?

Yes! CTI regularly offers a Meaningful Engagement Organisational Coach Training to prepare individuals from impacted communities to provide technical assistance to organisations working with this framework and these tools. Sign up on our website (collectivethreads.org) to receive updates for impacted people working on their issues. We are also in the process of developing additional tools for our coaches, and anyone subscribed to our Coaches list will receive updates as they are available.



Questions or ideas? Reach out to us at meaningfulengagement@collectivethreads.org or review the other documents in our Meaningful Engagement Toolbox at collectivethreads.org/meaningfulengagement.