


CTI's Meaningful Engagement Framework

In 2022, Sophie Otiende and Chris Ash partnered to create a framework for organisations to understand and improve their meaningful engagement practices. For years, Chris had already been teaching and writing about the spectrum of survivor engagement and Sophie about the ladder of survivor inclusion. We sought to bring these frameworks together to craft guidance for our own organisations to improve their practices, although we didn't initially set out to write a toolkit. We worked together on this framework in a process that included a team of staff and consultants with and without lived experience of exploitation. The more we worked through this process, the more we realised that we wanted to share what we were learning.

In January of 2023, the Meaningful Engagement of People with Lived Experience Toolkit and Assessment was published. The co-authors shared a vision for “open-sourcing the movement” and collective ownership of knowledge (rather than fierce hoarding of intellectual property by organisations who'd extracted those frameworks from staff). In line with those values, it was published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence. This meant that the toolkit could be accessed and used freely, and even adapted or additional tools created as long as the work was cited properly, not used for commercial purposes, and also made freely under the same licence as our original work.

This choice has allowed the toolkit to flourish, and it has been used and adapted in a variety of environments.

- ★ In 2022, the U.S. Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) funded ICF to provide training and technical assistance to any OVC-funded human trafficking grantees who wanted to improve their survivor engagement. ICF's Survivor Engagement Training and Technical Assistance (SETTA) staff and partners had early access to the toolkit and provided key insights that were integrated into our framework, and the framework we created has informed their ongoing training and technical assistance to local service providers across the country. ICF developed readiness assessments and additional trainings around the framework.
- ★ In 2023-2024, Freedom Fund partnered with the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery to provide support to both their Survivor Leadership Fund and Hotspot programmes in improving survivor engagement using the framework. GFEMS partnered with consultants trained by the authors to develop training and a workbook based on the framework.
- ★ In both 2023 and 2024, the National Survivor Network (NSN) provided five different cohorts of a 15-hour “organisational coach” training to prepare people with lived experience to be organisational consultants guiding programmes through improving their lived experience engagement practices. In early 2026, CTI offered two more cohorts the adapted training, now 18 hours, based on the revised handbook and cross-movement lens. To date, over sixty participants from the United States, Uruguay, Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Uganda have been trained, representing activists from impacted



communities working on human trafficking, gender-based violence, children and youth, LGBTQ+ rights, migrant worker rights, sex worker rights, and more. Our 2026 cohorts were entirely facilitated by past attendees, and our coaches are now working across multiple movements across the globe, adapting the framework for local and contextual use.

- ★ In 2024, the Council of Europe released its [Guidelines for policy makers on engaging with victims and survivors of child sexual exploitation and sexual abuse](#), which uses this framework as its model.
- ★ In 2024, the Australian Attorney-General's Department released its [Modern Slavery Lived Experience Engagement and Empowerment](#) guidelines, which uses this framework as its model.
- ★ In 2025, the United Nations Development Program Sustainable Finance Hub adapted this framework for its [Engaging People with Lived Experience: A brief for Investors](#).
- ★ In 2026, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's conference report for the [Voices of Resilience: Global Forum for Human Trafficking Survivors](#) adapted our framework with practical examples in global protection responses listed for each level.
- ★ Portions of the toolkit have been translated into Thai for use by [Whispering Willow](#) on its work creating an Asian survivor leadership network, and additional Thai-language tools have been created as well.
- ★ And we have heard from advocates in other fields, including sexual violence, domestic violence, homelessness, and substance use, that the toolkit has been used and useful in their work as well.

Sophie and Chris spent much of 2024 holding listening sessions and gathering feedback from partners familiar with meaningful engagement best practices, including people with lived experience, government officials, NGO staff. This body of work is currently in its second edition, and The Meaningful Engagement Toolbox (which includes The Meaningful Engagement Handbook as well as many tools to support its implementation) is available at <https://collectivethreads.org/meaningfuleengagement/>.