

# Nothing About Us Without Us

## Meaningful inclusion of service design and delivery for people who use drugs

One of the principles of harm reduction is to “ensure that people who use drugs and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them” ([NHRC](#)). This tip sheet breaks down helpful practices for agencies to meaningfully implement this principle.

### 12 Tips to meaningfully include people who use drugs (PWUD) in service design and delivery

- 1 Ask folks about what they need.** Always ask the population you are targeting what they need before you implement a new service. (“What location? What time of day? What supplies?”) Don’t assume what is wanted or needed.
- 2 Acknowledge the diversity of PWUD.** Folks who use drugs are a diverse group with diverse opinions. Don’t tokenize them (e.g., “We’ve got one so we’re good.”). Also, don’t substitute the voices of people in recovery for people who actively use drugs. These groups both represent important perspectives that are not interchangeable.
- 3 Use people-first language.** Instead of language that may be experienced as stigmatizing (e.g., “addict”, “junkie”), use people-first language (e.g., “people who use drugs”).
- 4 Always compensate folks’ time and expertise.** Cash is ideal, but if not possible, use gift cards.
- 5 Provide food.** If you are avoiding eating together due to COVID-19, send folks home with a meal.
- 6 Minimize “hoops” to jump through.** High thresholds for involvement or employment (e.g., drug testing, education requirements, background checks) can be exclusionary, harmful, and counterproductive.
- 7 Offer various levels of involvement.** Not everyone will join a monthly advisory board, but may join for a one-time event.
- 8 Go beyond surveys.** Surveys are great but may not *always* be most effective approach. Think about leveraging informal conversations, interviews, focus groups, community advisory groups, and—most ideally—hiring folks who use drugs!
- 9 Use data creatively to monitor progress.** For example, try quarterly surveys or [rapid evaluation approaches](#) instead of long intakes to understand whether or not you are reaching your population effectively.
- 10 Make involvement meaningful and iterative.** This isn’t a “one and done” process.
- 11 Expect bumps, hiccups, and crises.** PWUD, like everyone, have a lot going on in their lives. Try to meet challenges with empathy, respect, and support.
- 12 Intentionally create pathways to employment.** Ideally your program will hire PWUD, but ensure their longevity by allocating resources for professional development, coaching, and mentorship opportunities.

### Spectrum of involvement for people who use drugs (PWUD)

