Community Engagement At A Glance

Community Engagement is an increasingly important step in the autism research process, and is a powerful tool for researchers looking to improve the quality of their work. However, it can sometimes be difficult to work out how much engagement is appropriate for your project, with who, at what stage, and in what fashion. This worksheet aims to help you work through these initial key decisions for your specific project. Use the points and questions below to begin..

Support involvement at all stages, from the conception and planning stages as well as throughout the project. Allow flexibility with regard to when and how community partners are involved.

Purpose

- Why are you doing the engagement?
- Do the research priorities of the autistic community and your research align?
- Can it make your project more accessible or relevant?
- Can it help you to gauge community interest or opinion?
- Will it help to build and maintain trust?
- Could it help you explore themes and questions you may not have considered?
- Can it help orient your work towards practical and positive outcomes? For example, better support.
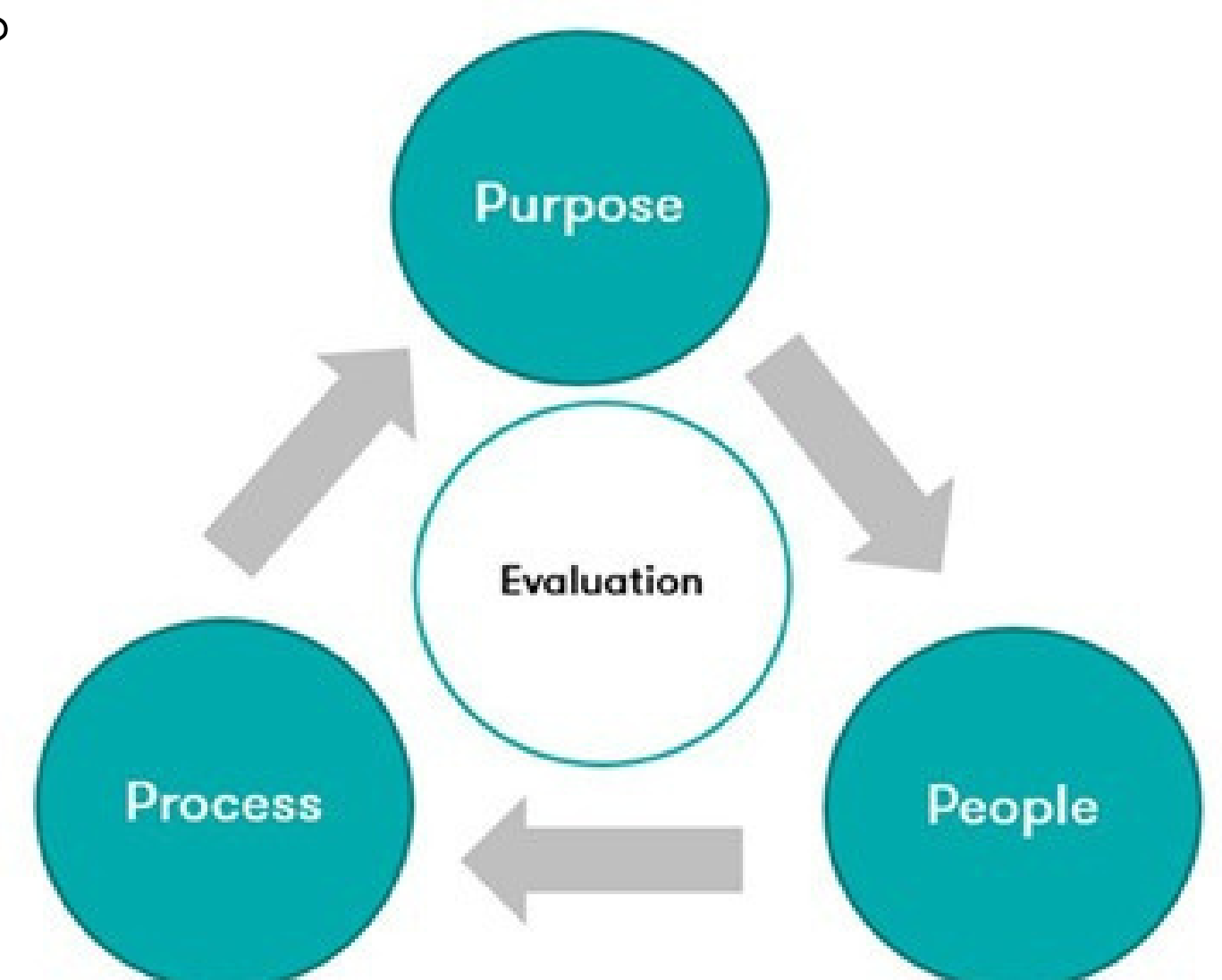- Will it provide accountability?

People

- Who is involved as participants, partners, deliverers or beneficiaries of the project and at which stage? As stakeholders their views should be taken into account. This will always include autistic people, but may additionally include other groups such as clinicians.
- Do you need to target your engagement at specific subgroups, such as autistic women?
- How many do you need to speak to?

Process

- Where does engagement seem appropriate to your project, and what kind of engagement could be best?
- Do you need to dig deeply into one particular aspect of the project?
- Do you want to get a general opinion from a large number of people?
- What does your budget and the resources open to you allow you to achieve?

Evaluation

- What data do you need to collect to evaluate your community engagement and at what stages?
- What have you achieved through your engagement work?
- What have you changed or what impacts has the engagement had on your work?
- Have there been wider learnings for your team or culture change?
- Did the approach you used achieve what you needed or is a different approach needed in the future?

Credit: The Co-Ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

The great thing about these principles is that each one can be used to inform the others.

So, if you know the purpose of your engagement, then that informs you as to what process and which people you should engage with. If you know a group of people are stakeholders in a project, then you can consider what process is best to reach them and what purpose this may serve.

Of course, the answers to these questions will be different for different projects, so use them as springboards to determine what your engagement should look like.

Created for use by the AIMS-2-TRIALS Communications & Community Engagement Team with the A-Reps, and Autism Research Centre of Cambridge.

Community Engagement Brainstorm

Use this worksheet to start the initial brainstorming for your community engagement plans.
Once you complete the 'Process' step, refer to the 'Evaluation' section of the previous page to finalise your plan.

Purpose

Below are different reasons why you might engage with the community through your work. Check the reasons that apply to your project. You can check multiple!

- ☐ Sharing your work
- ☐ Co-creating knowledge
- ☐ Responding to community needs
- ☐ Responding to community requests
- ☐ Learning from others

- ☐ Applying knowledge together
- ☐ Innovating together
- ☐ Building trust with the community
- ☐ Influencing the attitudes or behaviours of the community

People

List out whom you need to speak to achieve your purpose and for whom does your research have implications.

Process

List out the different engagement activities you would like to pursue during each phase of the research process. This can be different methodologies such as Community Based Participatory Research or engagement activities like focus groups.

Development	Implimentation	Dissemination	Sustainability

Plan Evaluation Editing

List out what resources and constraints you have for this project. This will allow you to scale down your plan where appropriate and figure out what you can reasonably accomplish.

Use this worksheet to evaluate the plan that you have created for community engagement.

Resources:	Constraints:

Process

List out the finalised ways that you will engage the community in your research process.

Funding	Implimentation	Dissemination	Sustainability

Great community engagement is...

Great community engagement is many things. However, making sure that your plan hits the points below is a start to making your engagement truly great. (credit F. Elise, What makes great participatory research, ITAKOM 2023)

Respectful

☐ Have funding to reimburse collaborators

☐ Have communicated in a way that is sensitive to everyone's need.

☐ Has steps to ensure collaborators understand the project and why/how they are involved

☐ Have considered other methods of acknowledgement (such as authorship).

☐ Have checked this Community Engagement Guide and the Language Guide

Manageable

☐ Have the power to carry out the engagement activities you plan

☐ Have the resources to carry out the engagement activities you plan

☐ Have the time to carry out the engagement activities you plan

Productive

☐ Have steps to ensure collaborators are a part of decision making

☐ Have steps to ensure collaborators know what can and cannot be changed about the project

☐ Have a plan to evaluate your engagement process and allow for feedback