



Leisure factsheet 8

# Partnerships and engagement

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**Developing  
partnerships  
is a great way to  
engage with disabled  
people and people  
with long-term  
health conditions.**

Collaborative and trusted relationships help organisations to understand people's behaviours and barriers, and provide better services.



# What makes your partnerships and engagement inclusive?

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Organisations with strong and inclusive partnership working engage with disabled people and people with long-term health conditions through:



Embedding partnership and collaborative working across all business areas.



Meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships based on shared outcomes and meeting the needs of everyone involved.



A clear understanding of audience with a wide range of partners to advise, influence, and support.



Co-production which empowers disabled people and people with long-term health conditions to influence decision-making and services.



Flexible, open attitudes and sustainable approaches to working and learning together.



Maximising use of shared resources, capacity, and expertise.



Proactive and well-planned partnerships with evidence of impact and effectiveness.



## Consider how you currently engage with other organisations and services and ask yourself:

- Do you value partnership working and use it to drive improvement?
- Have you identified and created strong connections with local groups and organisations that support disabled people and people with long-term health conditions?
- Are you working effectively with partners to develop and deliver services for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions?



# Developing inclusive partnerships and engagement

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There are many ways to approach and benefit from working in partnership with others:

## Plan and resource partnership working

Engaging with partners should empower more disabled people and people with long-term health conditions to influence and access your services. It's key to have a plan in place to improve and develop partnerships and collaborative working. Questions to ask yourself are:

- Is your approach structured, well thought out and formalised where necessary?
- Are your partnerships impactful, sustainable, and based on shared outcomes?



**Top tip:** To be effective, partnership working needs to be well established and integral to your business planning. It will often take time, effort and resource to get it right.

## Be clear about your outcomes

It's crucial to think about what you are trying to achieve.

- Are you looking for advocates to support engagement, help promote activities or provide knowledge on existing services?
- Do you need strategic support for organisational improvement, to shape future objectives and direct resources?
- Is your aim to support existing activity programmes or to promote physical activity as a positive option for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions?



**Top tip:** Be open and honest when identifying what you need from a partnership, this will help you build trusted relationships.

# Developing inclusive partnerships and engagement

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## Identify stakeholders and their priorities

Mapping your key stakeholders will help you understand their interest and influence in getting disabled people and people with long-term health conditions active. Consider what you currently know, and how you can learn more about local organisations and services. Think about how you can meet your own outcomes whilst also meeting the needs and priorities of these partners. Also, make sure you engage with a range of groups that represent people with different impairments and long-term health conditions.



**Top tip:** Remember it is often the quality and effectiveness of a partnership that is important, not the quantity of partners you work with.



# Developing inclusive partnerships and engagement

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## Have a broad mix of partners

Disabled people's organisations and networks are an obvious starting point when trying to broaden the reach and diversity of the partners you work with.

Don't forget to think about wider influencers and supporters too:

- Can you engage local authority and statutory service providers, for example adult social care, disability fostering teams, or specialist schools?
- What about local health agencies and professionals? Specialist nurses, occupational therapists, spinal cord injury units or limb centres could all be advocates for you.
- Consider other community partners. Can you link with local faith centres, youth groups, or housing providers?

Activity Alliance's factsheet on supporters' roles in engaging disabled people can help you connect with wider networks.



**Top tip:** Don't overlook your existing partnerships. Consider whether they can be used differently to reach new people and networks.

## Engage effectively

There is no one way to engage with disabled people and people with long-term health conditions, or the organisations who support them. The most effective approaches are based on co-production and decision-making led by people with lived experience.

Activity Alliance's effective engagement factsheets and Get Out Get Active - reaching the least active resource offer lots of great ideas to help strengthen your engagement. Our effective engagement factsheets also offer advice on engaging specific audiences including older people, children and young people, women, and people from low-income households.



**Top tip:** Regularly review the effectiveness of your partnership working. Remember to evidence impact, actively share learning and embed good practice.

## Useful resources

Activity Alliance has a suite of resources and services that can support you with developing partnerships and engaging with disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

- Check out our [engaging disabled people in sport and activity film](#).
- [Mind's influence and participation toolkit](#) and [Sport England's mapping disability resource](#) can support you in engaging with more disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.



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This factsheet is part of our leisure resource.

View the full resource on our website:

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This document is available in Word format. Please contact us if you need support. Activity Alliance is the operating name for the English Federation of Disability Sport. Registered Charity no. 1075180.