



Developing inclusive groups



What is an inclusive group?

To gain the most out of consumer participation it is important to cultivate an environment where consumers feel valued, and equal members with others in the participation group. This environment can best be identified as an 'inclusive group'.

Effective consumer engagement occurs in these inclusive groups or teams. Education in consumer engagement is vitally important for these groups. To achieve success, all members of the team are respected and engaged equally.

Inclusive groups which are committed to involving consumers demonstrate the following:

- **Champions:** leaders within the organisation who promote the benefits of consumer involvement
- **Mutual respect:** consumers are respected and valued for their contribution. Their views are actively sought, listened to and considered.
- **Equality:** consumers are considered equal members of the group
- **Combined professional development:** professionals and consumers undertake professional development together and learn from each other's knowledge and experience
- **Communication:** professionals and consumers communicate in a way that builds knowledge, understanding and mutual respect.

How do we develop inclusive groups that will be effective?

- Include consumers in the group from the very beginning. Aim to involve at least two consumers, where practical.
- Choose a Chair or leader who understands the value of consumer involvement and is committed to developing an inclusive group.
- Ensure the professional members support consumer involvement in the group and have the information and skills necessary to ensure smooth collaboration and communication.
- Make any meetings 'user friendly', avoiding jargon and acronyms; where it's necessary to use jargon, always provide definitions.
- Provide training and support for consumers from the beginning; being in this situation can be quite intimidating and they may feel that their opinion isn't being heard.
- Make sure your facilities and venue choices are appropriate to consumers and that they are accessible to them.