

Involvement toolkit

A simple guide to involving people in your work
March 2026

If you need this in another format, contact: NENCICB.Involve@nhs.net

Purpose of this toolkit

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This toolkit helps NHS staff involve people well.



This toolkit helps you:

- ✓ Understand why involvement matters
- ✓ Meet your legal duties
- ✓ Plan involvement properly
- ✓ Choose the right methods
- ✓ Avoid common mistakes

Good involvement leads to better services.

This toolkit supports staff across the ICB to involve people in a meaningful and lawful way.

It will help you:

- Understand your responsibilities
- Plan involvement with confidence
- Meet legal and equality duties
- Deliver fair and transparent service changes

Involvement is not optional. It is part of how we improve care.

The involvement team

The Involvement Team is here to help you. We can support you with:

- Planning involvement
- Stakeholder mapping
- Choosing the right methods
- Meeting legal duties
- Writing involvement plans
- Reviewing consultation documents
- If you are not sure where to start, we can guide you.

You can watch our short videos to learn more about:

- [What the Involvement team does](#)
- [Different types of involvement](#)



**Watch
these
videos**



**Meet our
team**

**Senior Head of
Involvement**

Jen Coe

**Senior Involvement
Manager**

Lisa Anderson

Involvement Managers

Daniel Blagdon

Jo Whaley

Kirsty McNally

Rebekah
McNaughton





[Understanding involvement](#)

Learn what involvement means. Understand the difference between engagement and consultation. Find out why the ICB must involve people.

[Legal and guidance section](#)

See the laws and national guidance we must follow when involving people.

[Planning involvement](#)

Plan who to involve, how to involve them, and when it should happen.

[Feeding back section](#)

Learn how to share what you heard and explain what will happen next.

[Support section](#)

Find useful guidance, tools, and templates to help you.

Understanding involvement

Why involvement matters

The ICB must
involve people.
This is the law.



Good involvement should



Be easy to
take part in



Happen early



Take place locally
and across
the region



Be inclusive
and accessible



Help us understand
different experiences



Avoid repeating
past conversations



Lead to clear
outcomes



Keep people
informed

Community engagement library

The Community Engagement Library brings together involvement reports from across the North East and North Cumbria in one searchable place.

Before you start:

- Search for similar work.
- Learn from previous involvement.
- Connect with people who have relevant experience.

After you finish:

- Share your involvement report.
- Help others avoid repeating the same work.



You can read about our [community library](#) in our “toolkit guides and templates” document to learn more

[Need access?](#)

Contact the Involvement Team or use Futures.

What do we mean by involvement?

There are different ways to involve people:

- **Engagement** - Talking with and listening to people.
- **Consultation** - A formal process when we plan big changes.
- **Co-production** - Working together as equal partners from the very beginning to design, shape, and improve services.
- **Lived experience involvement** - Working closely with people who use services.



Involvement strategy

The ICB has an involvement strategy. It explains how we work with people and communities. Our priorities are to:

- Involve people in a meaningful way
- Remove barriers so everyone can take part
- Listen to feedback and act on it
- Reduce health inequalities
- Build long-term relationships with communities

This strategy guides all our involvement work.



**Read our
strategy**

[Involving People and
Communities strategy
2024-28](#)

Legal and guidance section

Our legal duty to involve

The ICB has a legal duty to involve people when:

- Planning services
- Changing services
- Making decisions that affect care



This duty comes from the Health and Care Act 2022 and the NHS Act 2006.

What is a consultation?

We must consult when planning big changes such as:

- Moving a service
- Closing a service
- Changing how a service works

A consultation must:

- Be fair
- Be open
- Give people time to respond
- Consider what people say before decisions are made



The Gunning Principles

All consultations (and involvement more widely) must follow four rules:

1. Consult when ideas are still being developed
2. Give clear information
3. Allow enough time to respond
4. Carefully consider feedback before deciding

These are called the [Gunning Principles](#).



Equality and health inequalities

We must:

- Treat people fairly ([Equality Act 2010](#))
- Prevent discrimination
- Reduce health inequalities
- Improve access to services

Some groups may need extra support to take part.



NHS Constitution

The [NHS Constitution](#) says:

- Patients are at the heart of everything we do
- NHS organisations must involve people in decisions

**The patient will be at the
heart of everything the NHS does.**



The NHS Long Term Plan

The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) sets out how the NHS will improve care over 10 years.

It says:

- People should be involved in decisions about their care
- Services should be more joined up
- We should prevent illness, not just treat it
- Digital services should improve access
- Listening to communities helps improve care
- Involvement helps us deliver this plan.



NHS England statutory guidance

10 Principles for Good Involvement

We follow [NHS England guidance on working in partnership with people and communities](#).

This includes [ten principles](#) for good involvement.



**Involve people
in decisions**



Involve early



**Give clear
information**



**Understand
communities**



Build trust



**Empower
communities**



**Work with people
on big changes**



**Offer different
ways to take part**



**Work with VCSE
and Healthwatch**



**Learn and improve
from feedback**

Planning involvement

Who will you involve

Think about:

- Who is affected?
- Who uses the service?
- Who might be affected differently?

Use a stakeholder map to plan who needs:

- Information
- Engagement
- Close involvement

Start early and update it often.



You can read our [stakeholder mapping guide](#) in our “toolkit guides and templates” document to learn more

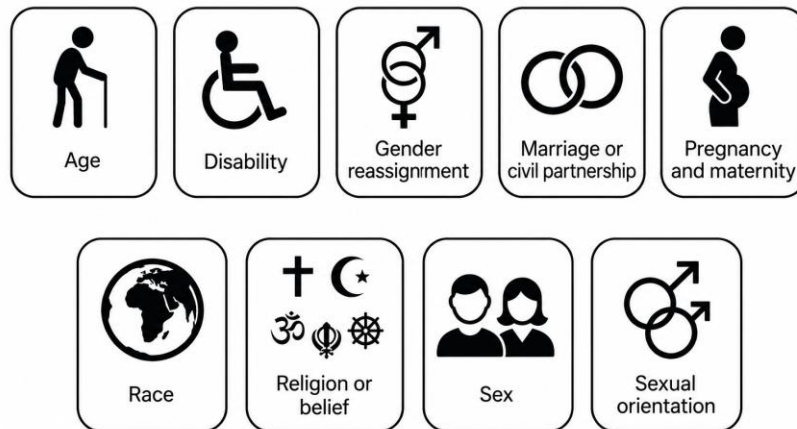
Include different groups

Make sure you include:

- Protected characteristic groups
- People facing health inequalities
- Groups whose voices are often missing

Ask yourself:

- Who have we reached?
- Who have we not reached?
- What can we do differently?



[Diversity monitoring questions](#) | [Our approach](#)



**Learn more
on our website**

Think about health inequalities

When planning involvement, think about people who may face extra barriers to accessing healthcare or having their voices heard.

Ask yourself:

Whose voice might be missing, and what can we do to include them?



Carers



Members of the Armed Forces community



People experiencing homelessness



Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities



Refugees and asylum seekers



People leaving prison



Veterans



People living in rural or isolated communities



People affected by digital exclusion



People experiencing poverty or financial hardship

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) helps us make sure our decisions are fair.

It checks how a new policy, service or proposed change could affect different groups of people.

This helps us meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010, reduce health inequalities and make services more accessible.

ICB teams complete an EqIA when developing new policies, commissioning new services or making significant changes to existing services.

[About our Equality Quality Impact Assessment Policy \(EQIA\)](#)



**Learn more
on our website**

Use different ways to listen

Different people prefer to engage in different ways.

You could use:

- Surveys
- Public events
- Focus groups
- Online meetings
- Community visits
- Social media



Using a mix of methods helps you reach more people.



You can read our [events checklist](#) in our “toolkit guides and templates” document to learn more

Make it accessible

62% of people living in NENC have a reading age of 11 or below.

Always:

- Use plain English
- Offer Easy Read where needed
- Make venues accessible
- Consider BSL interpreters
- Provide information in different formats
- Explain how to request support



You can read our [writing simply guide](#) in our “toolkit guides and templates” document to learn more

Think about your budget

Involvement may cost money. Plan for:

- Travel expenses
- Venue hire
- Interpreters
- Easy Read materials
- Printing and postage
- Social media promotion
- External support

Include these costs in your project budget.



It takes time

Good involvement cannot be rushed.

- Plan early
- Work backwards from your decision date
- Engagement (non-consultation): Allow at least 4 months
- Formal consultation: Allow 9–12 months

Use a Gantt chart or project plan to map key milestones, governance, involvement activities and decision points.

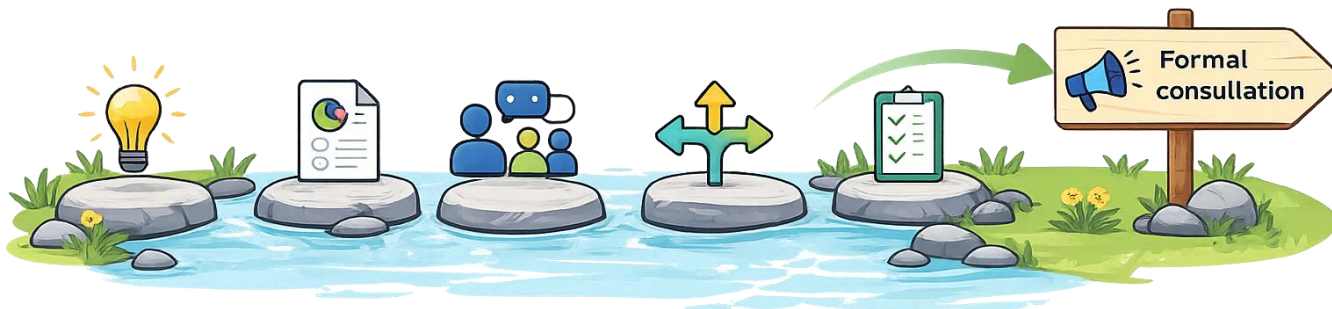


You can read our [example timescale planning template](#) in our “toolkit guides and templates” document to learn more

Pre-consultation engagement

Before starting a formal consultation:

- Explain why change is needed.
- Develop the case for change.
- Talk to people about early ideas.
- Develop and test different options.
- Agree how options will be assessed.



Write an involvement plan

Your involvement plan should explain:

- Who you need to involve
- Why you are involving them
- How you will involve them
- When involvement will happen
- How feedback will be used and shared



You can read our [plan on a page template](#) and our [involvement plan template](#) in our “toolkit guides and templates” document to learn more

Service Change Assurance

For larger service changes, the **Service Change Advisory Group** reviews the involvement process.

The group checks that:

- The legal duty to involve has been met.
- People have been involved at the right time.
- The approach is fair, inclusive and meaningful.
- Equality and health inequalities have been considered.

The group acts as a critical friend. It reviews the involvement process, not the decision or the preferred option.



Feeding back section

Feeding back

After involvement, tell people:

- What you heard
- What changed
- What did not change
- Why you made your decision

Good feedback builds trust.



Different ways to feedback

Choose methods that suit the people you involved.

-  Reports
-  Easy Read summaries
-  Email updates
-  Website updates
-  Social media
-  Public meetings

Use more than one method where possible

Use the same channels people used to get involved.



You can read our [feedback template](#) and [checklist](#) guide in our “toolkit guides and templates” document to learn more

Support section

Toolkit guides and templates

You may find these guides and templates useful:

Community Engagement Library	Check what already exists before planning.
Writing Simply Guide	Useful before writing surveys, letters and plans.
Stakeholder Mapping Guide	Decide who needs to be involved first.
Plan on a Page Template	High-level planning once you know your stakeholders.
Involvement Plan Template	Develop the full involvement plan.
Example Timescale Planning Template	Plan activities after the involvement plan is written.
Events Checklist	Practical guide for delivering events.
Feedback Template and Checklist	Complete after involvement has finished.



**Read our
document**

Toolkit guides
and templates

Links to useful documents online

- [Co-production toolkit](#)
- [Equality Act 2010](#)
- Equality questions
- [Health and care act 2022](#)
- ICB Involvement Strategy
- [Lived experience process](#)
- [NHS Act 2006](#)
- [NHS England statutory guidance](#)
- NHS Long Term Plan
- [Ten principles](#)
- [The Gunning Principles](#)
- [The NHS Constitution](#)

