What is an Equalities Approach?

Taking an equalities approach means placing people and communities who are usually on the margins at the centre when designing and developing programmes and projects.

It means looking beyond the categories in the Equalities Act 2010 and starting by understanding who is marginalised in your programme area, and asking how your programme will include the people and communities who are usually on the margins.

The guidance given in this briefing and the supporting document are not intended to suggest a tick-box list of 'equalities techniques', but instead provide a number of approaches that can be taken to support the inclusion of all older members of your community.

This briefing is a short summary of our document **A Toolkit for Inclusion in Practice,** which provides mini-case studies giving practical illustrations of each of the points raised in this document.

In our work, we have found four overarching principles to taking an equalities approach. These are:

KNOWLEDGE: Understanding key concepts and ideas is core to an equalities approach.

WAYS OF WORKING: Different approaches are needed depending on the size and geographical distribution of different marginalised groups. It is important to be creative and adapt..

CULTURE & VALUES: Create an inclusive culture through respect for the grassroots, a practical commitment to empowerment, and through treating people well.

LEADERSHIP: Leadership can come from any level of a programme.

Within this document, we provide a snapshot of ways of using these principles to guide you in developing, designing and delivering programmes and projects for older people.

Ambition for Ageing is a Greater Manchester level programme aimed at creating more age-friendly places and empowering people to live fulfilling lives as they age.

We do this by providing small investments to help develop more age-friendly neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester in addition to funding larger scale work across the city-region. As a research project, we are committed to sharing the learning we gain from the programme to help influence local, regional and national policy. Ambition for Ageing is part of Ageing Better, a programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

KNOWLEDGE

The key knowledge you need when working with an equalities approach is conceptual. It is necessary to understand what causes marginalisation, and how to work with the knowledge within communities at the margins.

UNDERSTANDING

Understanding structural exclusion: Recognising that people in communities of identity and experience are not marginalised because they possess certain characteristics, but because the way that society is organised excludes them.

Understanding there is diversity within minority communities: Even within minority communities there are groups with different needs and cultural preferences. When these are overlooked, people are further marginalised.

KNOWING

Knowing which groups are marginalised: Being aware of which groups are marginalised, or at risk of marginalisation helps target those who have been historically missed.

Knowing that marginalised communities are their own experts: Marginalised people are experts in their own experience. Working alongside these groups leads to projects and activities that meet their needs.

Knowing to look for strengths and assets: Sometimes the assets and strengths in minority communities may be hidden, and lie in less visible parts of their lives and histories.

WAYS OF WORKING

Most ways of working inclusively fall into two categories: widening or narrowing the scope or target audience of a project or activity*. Sometimes working with the most marginalised communities can require creativity, and working in unusual ways.

WIDENING

Inclusion: Often, projects and activities can have small changes made to them to meet the needs of a wider range of people in an inclusive way.

Partnership working: Working in partnership with other organisations who hold relevant expertise can allow us to widen the reach of activities and projects to include more people.

Increasing accessibility: By increasing accessibility to services, we can meet the needs of a wider number of people.

Universal design - one solution, many effects: Taking a universal design approach removes barriers for groups at risk of marginalisation as standard.

NARROWING

Targeted outreach to a minority community: Targeting outreach to a minority community is a way to focus attention, energy and other resources.

Targeted engagement of marginalised individuals: Targeting individuals is a way to engage and involve those who may not be engaged in wider activity.

Targeted solutions: Some specific solutions may arise following more in-depth work with communities.

BEING CREATIVE

Letting things evolve: Taking a lead from the local community and allowing things to evolve naturally benefits both organisations and individuals.

Bringing people together: It takes a great deal of creativity to bring together people from very different isolated or marginalised communities.

Flexibility: Flexibility is important when working with marginalised communities, and can bring many benefits as well as meeting the needs of communities involved.

CULTURE AND VALUES

Effective inclusion work expresses the values that underpin it. A culture of commitment to equalities and the rights of individuals and communities to speak and act for themselves is necessary to designing effective and supportive projects and activities.

Commitment to grassroots

Listening: In wider society, the voices and experience of older people are often pushed to the margins so listening is crucial.

Asking: A commitment to listening to older people has to be backed up by asking the right questions, and action to hearing from more marginalised older people.

Working where people are: Understanding the needs of communities includes meeting them where they are, both physically and metaphorically.

Co-production and co-design: A commitment to co-production and co-design exemplifies and ensures an inclusive approach and can make delivery more effective.

Empowerment: Isolation and disempowerment often occur together - and compound each other. It's not just hard to break out of this double trap, it's also hard to reach people in this situation, which is why empowering people is so important.

TREATING PEOPLE WELL

Valuing individuals: Sometimes working inclusively in practice is about small acts of care and attention.

Making people feel welcome: Inclusion is an embodied experience; people need to feel welcome, and safe.

LEADERSHIP

An inclusive culture comes from strong leadership - but leaders aren't always at the top of an organisation, and can be found at many levels within a programme. Leaders may be individual staff, groups and organisations, or community members.

Leadership may involve initiating work, modelling good practice, or being a passionate local champion.

Raising awareness: Sometimes inclusion is about raising awareness of marginalised groups and providing them with a platform.

Modelling inclusion: Inclusion is not only about meeting people's needs, but about modelling inclusion throughout design and delivery.

Finding and supporting a community champion: Identifying and supporting community champions can be key to working within local communities.

A Toolkit for Inclusion in Practice

This briefing is a summary of a larger document, **A Toolkit for Inclusion in Practice.** The toolkit contains collected mini case studies giving practical illustrations of ways of working inclusively, taking an integrated approach to equalities work.

We hope the toolkit is useful to start conversations within your organisations and communities about equalities, with each section illustrating several different ways of thinking about how we can work inclusively.

These examples are highly diverse. The reasons for this include the flexibility allowed by Ambition for Ageing's 'test and learn' approach, the inclusive design of the programme as a whole, and the culture of support for inclusive working at all levels of the programme.

Download the complete Toolkit from
www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/inclusiontoolkit

A Spatial Approach to Working with Marginalised Communities

This briefing can also be read alongside our briefing and workbook, **A Spatial Approach to Working with Marginalised Communities,** which introduces a new model we developed to support mapping and working with marginalised communities.

In particular, the model can help you to work out whether widening or narrowing techniques are likely to be effective for target marginalised groups (as detailed on page 2 of this briefing).

Download the briefing and workbook from
www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/equalitiesmodel