

# Meaningful engagement with OPDs

Organisations and legislation often use the phrase ‘meaningful engagement’ when referring to involving specific groups. But what does it really mean? The truth is that meaningful engagement will look slightly different depending on the context.

**In international law** the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) sets the tone on what meaningful engagement means in **General Obligations 4.3**. This calls on States to ‘closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations’ in the development and implementation of legislation and policies and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to people with disabilities. Article 33 further outlines specifically how people with disabilities and OPDs should be consulted on national implementation and monitoring of the CRPD, ensuring that mechanisms are in place for this to happen.

**Domestically**, the role of the UK Government’s **Disability Unit**, based in the Cabinet Office, is to consult with OPDs and other UK government departments on coordinating the implementation of the CRPD. It also supports the cross-governmental role of the Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work in providing guidance on how to meaningfully engage people with disabilities in determining government strategy such as the upcoming National Strategy for Disabled People. In June 2020, the Disability Unit launched a Disabled People’s Organisation Forum which aims to bring the views, insights and lived experience of people with disabilities to the centre of policy making.

**At community level**, local authorities have an obligation under the Equality Act 2010 and the CRPD to ensure participation by people with disabilities in development and decision-making processes, and ensure an inclusive approach to this. To support this, Disability Rights UK issued guidance on **how local authorities can work with OPDs** which explores how they can facilitate the development of inclusive communities, and includes helpful examples of where this has worked.

At Leonard Cheshire we believe that meaningful participation is an approach that puts people with disabilities at the front and centre of our work. We aim to ensure that people with disabilities are invited to **purposefully participate** in our influencing and decision making processes.



**“I know, as a person with a disability, that I am fully capable of bringing about change; I am an expert of experience and that is powerful. So many new networks have opened up to me... I have formed incredible partnerships with DPOs, other brilliant disability and inclusion activists, media personalities and high profile people.”**

Maria Njeri, one of the youth reporters from Leonard Cheshire’s 2030 and Counting project, relays her own experience

Meaningful engagement may involve, but is not limited to:

**Participating** in decision-making processes (eg membership on Boards, Committees and Advisory groups)

**Promoting** advocacy (eg speaking engagements, being a media spokesperson, participating in pre-election activities, organising a public awareness event)

**Working** in programmes (eg peer mentorship, group leadership or facilitation, participating in fundraising activities, developing volunteer training materials)

**Reviewing** materials (eg reviewing drafts of publications)

**Assisting** with the operation of the organisation (eg participating on a staff hiring team, facilitating a component of new staff orientation and ongoing staff training, helping with office tasks)

## Who benefits when engagement is meaningful?

Striking the right balance so that meaningful participation has mutual benefit is important. Some positive benefits for both OPDs and partnering organisations when working together include:



### Partnering organisation:

- Provides credibility and legitimacy that the organisation represents and supports the 'voice' of people with disabilities
- Increases capacity by capitalising on skills and abilities of people with disabilities
- Doing work that is relevant
- Decision-making is informed
- Easier to identify gaps in approach
- Ensures work is appropriate and addresses real concerns/issues of people with disabilities
- Adds depth to the organisation's culture, dispelling myths and stereotypes
- Should impact staff positively

### OPDs:

- An opportunity to address issues related to living with disability
- May gain recognition for skills and experiences shared
- Provides opportunities to influence policies and programmes which can have an impact
- An opportunity to provide the perspective of people with disabilities and affect decision making
- An opportunity to develop personal/organisational strategy/activities
- May receive financial recompense for services provided

## Quick links

- CRPD General Obligations 4.3: [www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-4-general-obligations.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-4-general-obligations.html)
- CRPD Article 33: [www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-33-national-implementation-and-monitoring.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-33-national-implementation-and-monitoring.html)
- Disability Unit: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disability-unit](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disability-unit)
- Disability Rights UK's Inclusive Communities: A guide for Local Authorities: [www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/pdf/1%20%20InclusivecommunitiesLAGuidance.pdf](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/pdf/1%20%20InclusivecommunitiesLAGuidance.pdf) (the PDF takes a while to load but stick with it!)