



**CONNECT
HACKNEY**
ageing better



Outreach and Engagement – Older People

Practical tips for the voluntary and community sector, and recommendations for funders and commissioners.

March 2020



The advice below comes from over 25 projects, funded by Connect Hackney, which work with socially isolated and seldom heard people in the borough. It reflects learning from the experiences of project staff and older people, as well as formal evidence from the evaluation of our projects by the University of East London.

1) Outreach is skilled work

- Outreach is a specialist skill – staff who are excellent at working with older people still need support and training to develop outreach skills
- When recruiting staff for roles that include outreach, consider hiring people with experience in sales or other public facing roles
- Training and supporting staff to develop outreach skills is time-intensive but it is a worthwhile investment.

2) Be clear about who you want to reach and how

- When designing your project, create descriptions of the types of people you want to reach, where you might find them, what their barriers to participation might be, and how to mitigate them (include specifying in what circumstances the project is not appropriate)
- Be realistic about how many new people you want to reach and how much time it may take to find and engage them
- Research the area in which you are working, including by talking to older people and trying to identify relevant places, services and community groups that have connections to the people you want to reach
- Building new referral pathways with other charities and/or the public sector can be key to reaching new people, but this takes time, so budget for the resources required and list this as a distinct piece of work in your project plan
- When building referral pathways with partners, be explicit about who your project is for, and the level of support you can provide, to minimise the chance of inappropriate referrals.

3) Create an 'on-the-ground' outreach plan

- If you are aiming to reach isolated people, promote your project in spaces beyond the voluntary sector (e.g. cafes, launderettes, pubs, supermarkets, private care homes, etc.)
- Think about transport links – do outreach in places that are well connected to where your project is based
- Don't approach people in pairs as this can be intimidating – stay safe and in sight of each

other but try to talk to people 1-1

- Where possible, leaflet an area to let residents know when you will be knocking on doors – this has been shown to make people more receptive
- On-the-ground outreach is tiring work for staff – ideally, only schedule short blocks (e.g. two hours at a time)
- Consider wearing casual clothes instead of uniforms in order to be more relatable, but have a visible ID badge
- Listen to the person you reach, don't just promote your project
- Providing refreshments at promotion events can encourage participation.

4) Have a strong communications plan

- Create a strong brand for your project using images and language that will appeal to the people you want to attract
- Use different kinds of publicity and marketing techniques (e.g. leaflets, stalls, social media, newspaper adverts etc.) to increase the pool of people you communicate with
- Your communications approach should include materials designed for the friends, family and neighbours of the people your service is designed for, to better reach people who aren't engaged with services and community groups
- Don't frame your publicity around the problem you want to address – instead highlight the positive aspects of your project
- Make sure you have a clear offer to communicate to people, even if you want to co-produce the project and are inviting people to help shape it.

5) Be flexible and responsive in order to retain people once you've engaged them

- Offer drop-in sessions as well as structured activities so that people feel able to come back after missing sessions
- Ahead of the activity, phone/text people based on their individual preferences in order to remind or encourage them to attend
- Involve participants in the design and delivery of your project
- Listen to participants and incorporate feedback about your project.