

A checklist of key questions to guide the mental health co-production process

This checklist enables strategists, managers, service users, groups and practitioners to co-create change by understanding and addressing practical issues that are likely to come up during the co-production process.

Step 1: What activity do you want to co-produce and why?

Questions to ask

- Who has defined the issue or problem to be addressed?
- Who will initiate or lead the activity?
- What do you envisage will be achieved by using this approach?
- What will be done to ensure that all the right people come together from the outset and how will this be decided?
- What is the history of service user involvement locally and what can be learned from that?

Suggested Strategies

- Define problems or issues jointly with service users, carers and staff.
- Irrespective of who initiates the activity, recognise and draw upon everyone's expertise, strengths and skills - these may not be apparent at the outset and emerge during the process, once trust and confidence grow between those involved.
- Identify and articulate what can change as a result of co-production, based on knowledge of what has worked and not worked previously.
- The focus of the co-productive project will help to determine who needs to be involved – ensure that this includes staff from a range of backgrounds as well as service users and carers
- Take time to build positive, trusting relationships between all involved, especially if people have had negative experiences of involvement in the past.

Step 2: Developing a shared understanding about the problem or issue being addressed.



Questions to ask

- How will those involved define the changes and agree on a process of getting there?
- How will a shared understanding and agreement of the problem or issue being tackled be developed among service users, frontline staff and staff?
- How will the process of finding common ground be managed so that staff and service users feel safe and empowered to tackle issues including dealing with any disagreements that could arise?
- How will service users be supported to express their stories and use their lived experience in developing a shared understanding?
- How will staff be supported to express their stories and use their lived experience in developing a shared understanding?



Suggested Strategies

- Negotiate a process for working together, including timeframes, issues to address and frameworks that can be used to help
- Agree a set of shared values, aims and ground rules, including how any disagreements will be worked through together
- Build in time and create a feeling of safety so staff and service users are able to talk about their lived experience of using and providing mental health services – all of which should help to develop a better understanding about what needs to change and the way in which that can be done.

Step 3: Identifying desirable outcomes and paying attention to the process.



Questions to ask

- How will the knowledge, expertise, assets, strengths and contribution of everyone involved be utilised throughout the process, to generate a better understanding.
- How will challenges, or emotional expression from people with lived experience, or staff, be integrated into learning about what needs to change and how?
- How will staff be supported and encouraged to be honest about their own personal and frontline experience?
- Will people with lived experience be expected to conform to formal meeting rules and use a particular language to be heard, or will a different kind of relationship and communication be forged?
- How will other practical issues such as access, payment and expenses or facilitation of meetings be addressed?
- How will change be demonstrated and communicated to all those involved?
- How will barriers and challenges experienced be overcome?
- What will happen if some challenges and barriers cannot be overcome? How will that be dealt with?



Suggested Strategies

- Co-produce a set of outcomes (desired change) with everyone involved
- Develop a better understanding about the expertise, assets and strengths of people coming together and make sure of these are drawn upon throughout the process
- Consider equal access requirements as well as payment and expenses issues at the outset, ensuring that everyone who wishes to, is able to participate fully

Step 4: Tracking progress



Questions to ask

- How will progress be tracked and measured? This includes progress towards achieving the desired outcome(s) for service users and service system(s) and the process itself, looking at what is and is not working from different perspectives, including:
 - any shift in power dynamic and increase in trust/confidence between professionals and service users;
 - openness and capacity for challenge
 - recognition of assets and expertise
 - changing relationships;
 - growing confidence and skills development for all parties



Suggested Strategies

- Build in time throughout the entire process to review what is working and not working and also whether anything is changing, as a result of people coming together to work on shared priorities.
- Consider using 4 plus 1 questions to review work:
 - What have we tried?
 - What have we learned?
 - What are we pleased about?
 - What are we concerned about?
- The answers to these questions leads to the next question (Plus 1) “Based on what we know, what should we do next?”

Step 5: Learning from experience



Questions to ask

- How will the learning from the work be captured including what could be done differently next time?



Suggested Strategies

- Consider use of blogs, stories, videos and other creative means of sharing the learning more widely across service systems and local communities.