



Carrying out influence and participation activities: Co-production

Co-production is an increasingly common concept in the work we do at Mind, as well as for organisations we work with closely. There can sometimes be pressure to work to the principles of co-production, so we need to have a clear understanding of what it means.

What is co-production?

Co-production happens when the participation of people with lived experience is given equal importance to that of staff at the organisation they're working with. Their input has equal weight, including in both the design and the delivery of services or a project.

Here is New Economics Foundation's [National Co-production Critical Friends](#) definition again:

“Co-production is a relationship where professionals and citizens share power to plan and deliver support together, recognising that both partners have vital contributions to make in order to improve quality of life for people and communities.”

There are many other definitions, we have included links to these below.

Co-production or participation?

The difference between co-production and other forms of influence and participation is that, in co-production, people with lived experience play an equal role in both designing and delivering services, rather than making suggestions that professionals are responsible for deciding upon and implementing.

The origins of co-production

To get to grips with the idea of co-production, it might be interesting to think about its origins.

The term was coined by Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues at Indiana University in the late 1970s, as part of a study they undertook into policing in Chicago.

It was evident that crime rates went up when police changed from foot patrol to using cars. By no longer patrolling on foot, it meant the police force had lost the vital one-to-one connection between officers and the community.

The car served as a barrier to the reciprocal relationships the police and the community previously had. This highlighted the fact that, to provide an effective service and to maintain order, the police needed the community as much as the community needed the police.

In the context of social service provision, Ostrom and her colleagues noted that, far from simply being passive consumers, members of communities had the capacity to feed into services, helping to design and even deliver them and achieve better outcomes as a result.



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Just like the Chicago police patrol cars, there are barriers in mental health services. But they can be overcome if everybody involved genuinely embraces the concept of co-production.

Definitions of co-production

The diagram outlining [levels of influence and participation](#) shows that people who use services can help shape them in a number of valid and important ways, and co-production can be one of the most compelling. But it's important when claiming to be working to a model of co-production that everyone involved understands what it entails and can really commit to its principles.

The Care Act 2014 defines co-production as follows:

Co-production is when an individual influences the support and services received, or when groups of people get together to influence the way that services are designed, commissioned and delivered.

**[Care and Support Statutory Guidance](#) – Issued under the Care Act 2014
Department of Health, June 2014 (page 19, paragraph 2.14)**

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) explains that co-production as a concept is difficult to [define](#). It has created extensive resources on the subject to support people who want to work in this way.

SCIE has also devised two short videos that explore co-production in a fun and engaging way.

- ***Have we got co-production news for you: episode one*** – a discussion about different aspects of co-production [here](#).
- ***Have we got co-production news for you: episode two*** – test your knowledge and understanding of co-production with a short quiz [here](#).

“This is not about consultation or participation – except in the broadest sense. The point is not to consult more, or involve people more in decisions; it is to encourage them to use the human skills and experience they have to help deliver public or voluntary services.”

New Economics Foundation

“Co-production is broadening and deepening public services so that they are no longer the preserve of professionals or commissioners, but a shared responsibility.”

Community Service Volunteers

“People Powered Health... transforming the perception of people from passive recipients of services and burdens on the system into one where they are equal partners in designing and delivering services.” ***Nesta***

Principles of Co-Production



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Co-Production embodies a set of fixed principles, if you are not able to adhere to these you will need to make some changes before you use this method.

1. **Equality** – Co-production is based on the ethos that everyone is equal and has skills that will benefit the project. Status within the group must always be equal regardless of job title or role.
2. **Diversity** – The people taking part should be as representative of the community where the project is taking place as possible, attention should be given to barriers underrepresented groups may face so changes can be made to ensure that activities are inclusive to all communities and groups.
3. **Accessibility** – This means that everyone has the support and opportunity to take part, in order to achieve this you will need to think about the format your materials are presented in, support worker costs, accessibility of the building amongst other things.
4. **Reciprocity** – Co-production is a two way process, everyone involved should get something out of being involved e.g. Learning, payment, friendship

[SCIE: Co-production in social care: What it is and how to do it](#)
Website, 2017

Co-production checklist

If you want to work within a co-production model, it might be useful to ask yourself the following questions in relation to your project:

1. Are people with lived experience of mental health problems able to work with staff at all stages of this piece of work?
2. Will people with lived experience have an equal role with staff in making decisions?
3. Will staff and people with lived experience be jointly responsible for designing and delivering this project/service?

If you can answer 'yes' to all three questions, it's likely that your project or service can be developed with a co-production approach.

Resources

As part of Nesta's People Powered Health programme, it created the *People Powered Health Co-Production Catalogue* in partnership with the New Economics Foundation and the Innovation Unit. The catalogue draws on examples of collaborative and co-produced public services in action, with a focus on health and social care.

The catalogue is a useful resource comprising case studies, tools and resources to help you to think about co-production and how you might be able to use the approach in your work.

You can download and read the [*People Powered Health Co-Production Catalogue*](#)



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SCIE has created a [Guide to Co-production](#) that explains the process in more depth. Film and case studies are used to illustrate different aspects of this creating a comprehensive and engaging resource that will help you understand and make the most of this method.