

Levels of Engagement

Understanding How Lived Experts Want to Participate

Lived Experts come to systems change work with different experiences, capacities, and goals. Some may want to share feedback or stay informed, while others are ready to lead, co-create, or facilitate change. The Levels of Engagement framework helps us match each person's comfort level with the right type of role, support, and compensation. It also helps systems understand what kind of preparation and readiness is needed to truly share power. There is no "better" level, what matters is making space for all types of participation in ways that are respectful, flexible, and equitable.



INFORM

Share information with lived experts to keep them updated. They receive details but don't give input.



CONSULT

Ask for their opinions and feedback. Their ideas are considered, but others make the final decisions.



INVOLVE

Work with them more closely. They help shape decisions, but others still have the final say.



COLLABORATE

Partner with them in making decisions. They have an active role in planning and problem-solving.



EMPOWER

Give them real decision-making power. They take the lead, and their choices help drive change.

(IAP2, n.d.)

Understanding the Levels of Engagement Helps in Several Important Ways

Now that we've explored the different ways Lived Experts may want to engage, the next step is applying this framework to build strong partnerships. Each level of engagement comes with different responsibilities, time commitments, and support needs. This section outlines how the Levels of Engagement can guide our decisions about recruitment, compensation, contracts, training, and organizational readiness. It helps us plan ahead, so Lived Experts are set up to succeed, and our systems are prepared to support them.

1. Matching Roles to Readiness

By understanding where each Lived Expert wants to engage, we can offer roles that reflect their comfort, capacity, and interest. Some may want to observe or give feedback. Others may want to lead or co-create. Every level is valuable—and each one deserves the right kind of support.

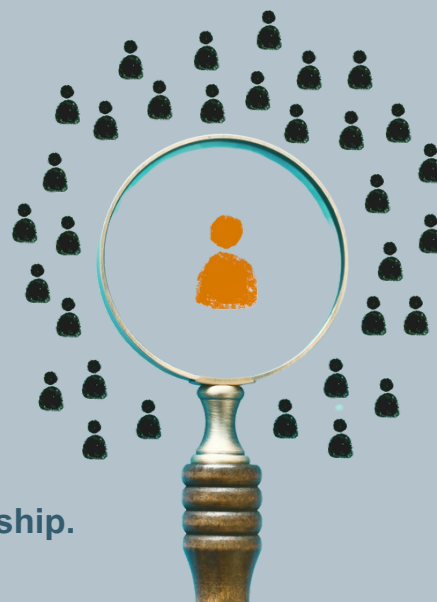
2. Recruitment and Contracting

The level of engagement helps determine how we invite people in and what kind of agreements make sense. For example, someone who wants to help lead a project may need a formal contract, a higher rate of pay, and clear expectations. Someone contributing to a listening session may only need a short-term agreement and a stipend.

3. Determining Pay and Support

The deeper the engagement, the more support people may need. Higher levels of involvement may require:

- More time and prep
- Specialized training or mentoring
- Emotional and logistical support
- Consistent communication
- Fair and timely compensation

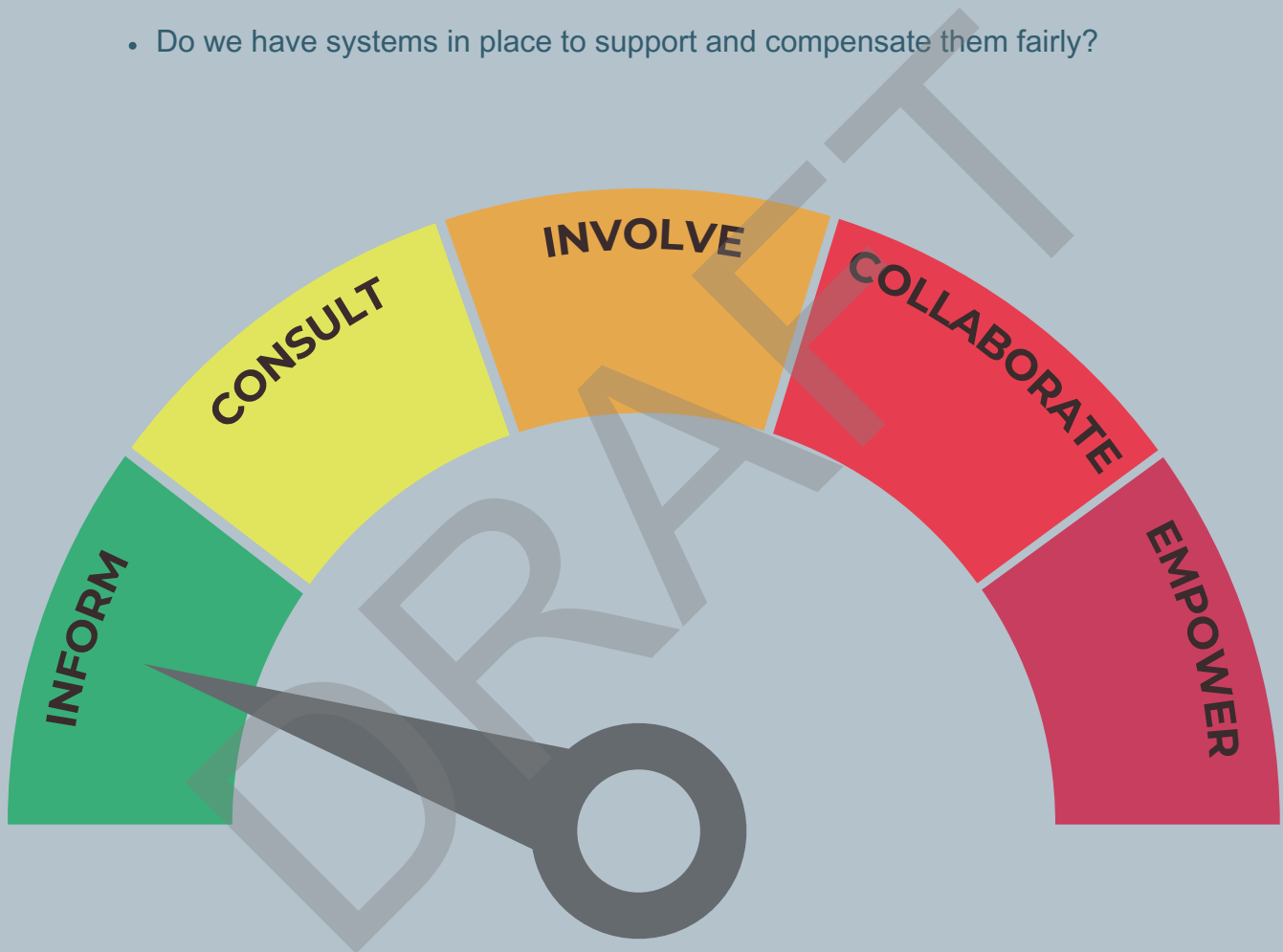


Matching pay and support to engagement level shows we value Lived Experts' time and leadership.

4. Assessing Organizational Readiness

The ability of a Lived Expert to collaborate or lead also depends on how ready the organization is to share power. Higher engagement levels require more flexibility, openness, and willingness to adapt. Before asking someone to step into a leadership role, we should ask:

- Are we ready to co-design with them?
- Are we ready to make changes based on their feedback?
- Do we have systems in place to support and compensate them fairly?



By using the Levels of Engagement framework, we can create a more supportive, effective, and fair environment for Lived Experts, ensuring their voices are heard and their contributions valued at every stage.
