

Recognition and reward for participation activities: good practice guide



1. Introduction

In Our Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation, we are committed to working collaboratively with children, young people, parents and carers to design, deliver, review and improve our services and support for families. This includes recognising and rewarding the valuable contribution everyone involved in participation makes.

This document provides colleagues across the Children and Families Department with a guide on how to decide upon the most appropriate form of recognition and reward for the children, young people, parents and carers involved in participation activities. It recommends a flexible approach so that decisions can be built around their individual needs and circumstances. It recommends that you discuss the approach with the person or group involved at the start of your participation activity.

The guide has been developed with the Children and Families Participation Network and is informed by the experience and knowledge of Network members, the work of the Adult Social Care Co-production Team, Integrated Care Partnership co-production colleagues, other local authorities, national governments, and UK not-for-profit organisations. We continue to work with the Adult Social Care Department to identify potential opportunities to work together.

2. What do we mean by reward and recognition

To achieve meaningful involvement with children and families in our participation activities we need to make sure that they know we value their time and expertise. To do this in a consistent and fair way, it's helpful to have a shared understanding of what we mean by the different types of reward and recognition. When we say these terms we mean the following:

Reward - something given in recognition of service, effort or achievement; for example, celebration activity, job/education reference, voucher or payment, access to other developmental opportunities.

Recognition - something that shows appreciation or acclaim for an achievement; for example, thank you letter, recognition of impact of their contribution, formal accreditation, award nominations.

Incentive - something that motivates or encourages someone to do something; for example, prize draw, goody bag, work experience placement, skill development/training, making new friends, fun!

What it's not - overcoming barriers to participation. It's important to not confuse reward and recognition with the help that someone or a group may need to take part in your participation activity. Barriers may include disability, stigma and social, digital, or financial exclusion.

3. Why reward, recognise and incentivise

- To say thank you for volunteering for our participation activities
- To show that we value the time and expertise of participants
- To recognise the impact of participants' work

- To address power imbalances - experts by experience are not expected to contribute for free when others involved (professionals) are being paid, particularly for co-production
- To provide evidence of personal development for participants

4. Principles

How you and your participants decide to reward and recognise contributions to participation activities should be based on the following principles:

1. Inclusive and safe
 - No-one should be out of pocket because of their participation
 - Offer extra support to individuals who need it to access activities; for example, creche/activities for children so that parents and carers of young children can attend
 - Offer a range of reward and recognition to individuals; for example, vouchers to reduce risks relating to a person's vulnerability to misusing funds or financial exclusion, such as if the person does not have a bank account
 - Consider the individual's circumstances to determine the most appropriate reward, recognition, or incentive for them
2. Transparency
 - Discussion with participants at planning stage about what reward, recognition or incentive is available and preferred
 - Be clear about what any payment covers; for example, the voucher value includes attendance at co-production workshop as well as any preparation for it
 - Alert participants that there may be impact on their benefits and/or tax and ensure they understand it is their responsibility to manage this
 - Signpost participants to specialist benefits advice
3. Informative
 - Be clear about the activity and how/if it will be rewarded or recognised
 - Individuals can decide whether to accept reward or recognition and request an alternative
 - Be clear with participants that any reward or recognition is optional
4. Accountable
 - Ensure there is a plan to feed back any impact from the activity to participants
5. Respectful
 - Our rewards, recognition and incentives are intended as a "gift" to say thank you to participants for volunteering their time and expertise to the participation activity
 - Provide reward, recognition and incentive as well as expenses as close to the activity as possible - don't delay!

These principles also apply when deciding how you will cover travel and other financial costs, to remove some of the barriers to participation. For example, if no petty cash is available, provide additional vouchers to cover travel expenses and/or mobile data and all costs.

5. Considerations

When deciding on your approach to reward and recognition, you need to consider the following:

1. Affordability - What budget is available to provide reward, recognition and/or incentives. Your budget needs to cover, as a minimum, any costs incurred by participants as part of the project, for example, travel and refreshments.

If your budget doesn't allow for financial reward, be upfront with participants and discuss what they would value as an alternative no-/low-cost alternative.

2. Impact of cash or in-kind payments - we recommend any financial reward is given as vouchers, based on the current minimum hourly living wage (appropriate for each age group). Vouchers can be classed as a gift in terms of tax and benefits. A letter to benefits agencies can help to show that the purpose of the activity is not employment. If you do offer cash, it is important that these are not regular payments as this will likely be seen as employment and may impact on tax and benefits.

3. Consistency in type and value of reward - whilst being flexible with the type of reward, recognition, or incentive, to ensure they are appropriate for individuals or groups, the value that you offer needs to be broadly consistent across individuals, groups, participation activity/projects, and the Children and Families Department. For example, the value of reward for a young person speaking at a conference arranged by one team, needs to be consistent with the value of reward for a young person taking part in recruitment interviews arranged with another team.

4. Age range - ensure the reward, recognition or incentive is appropriate for the age of individuals and groups. For example, it may not be appropriate to give vouchers to children under 11, they may prefer a toy. Individual young people who are living independently may prefer a supermarket voucher. Parents and carers may prefer a letter of thanks or personal reference to help with future work and volunteering activities.

6. Eligible activities

It's important to be consistent in our approach to which types of activity are appropriate to offer rewards, recognition, or incentive for. Below is a list of criteria to help you decide whether your participation activity is eligible.

1. The activity is taking place outside of the regular meetings that a child, young person, parent or carer usually attends. For example, a young person regularly attends youth forum meetings, or a parent regularly attends a monthly Family Hub coffee morning.

2. The activity requires extra support and/or training for participants to be able to meaningfully participate. For example, a young person in a youth forum is asked to help recruit new youth workers and needs to attend training to learn new skills and knowledge, to enable them to complete the role in a meaningful way.

3. The activity requires participants to have specific skills or experience to meaningfully participate. For example, some parents who attend the Family Hub coffee morning have children with special educational needs or disabilities, and the commissioner of the short breaks and respite offer comes to one of the coffee mornings to ask them about their specific experiences to help improve the service.

4. The activity is being run at the request of an external organisation or service. For example, the district council wants the Children in Care Council to co-produce their new local offer for care leavers with them.

5. The activity is a targeted consultation on a specific subject with a specific group of experts-by-experience, via focus group, workshop or questionnaire/survey. For example, an incentive of a £10

voucher prize draw is offered to care leavers when they complete an on-line questionnaire to gather their views about the draft Looked After Children and Care Leavers strategy.

Overview of eligible activities (not exhaustive list)

- Completing a targeted survey or questionnaire, either on-line or on paper, independently or with support, especially when you want to hear from "seldom heard" groups.
- Consultation/focus group
- Training to enable participation in a specialist activity, e.g. recruitment, commissioning, service inspections/quality assurance
- Attending interview panels
- Training delivery
- Service evaluations/inspections
- Attending strategic board meetings as a representative of an expert-by-experience group
- Speaking at or running a workshop at a conference or similar event
- Co-production of, for example, training package, tender specification, policy or strategy, marketing and communication products such as films, posters/other artwork.

7. Overcoming financial barriers to participation

It's important to understand the difference between providing financial resources to remove some of the barriers to participation and providing a token of thanks or recognition. This means you need to consider and plan for both as part of your participation activity to ensure you can gather the voices and input from the widest range of experts-by-experience.

The following are some of the costs you may need to cover to enable inclusive and meaningful participation activities:

- Travel costs, such as mileage allowance for car or bicycle journeys, bus, train or taxi fare
- Parking costs
- Specialist support such as a non-English language interpreter or sign-language interpreter
- Caring costs such as covering additional childcare costs or paying for a care worker if the expert-by-experience is away from home when they would need to attend to the needs of the person they care for
- Data costs to cover telephone, broadband and/or printing
- Refreshments - at least drinks and snack (mix of nutritious and "treat") and/or a meal where it is a longer session over a mealtime. Providing food and drink also demonstrates a welcoming and nurturing approach to working with our experts-by-experience

Where possible, pay for the item before it is needed (e.g. data costs), or directly to the supplier (e.g. taxi fares, childcare or care worker, or interpreter costs).

Where this isn't possible, ask individuals to keep receipts and travel tickets and reimburse as soon as possible. If petty cash isn't an option, provide a retail voucher of equivalent value (at a minimum of £5).

Be clear with participants from the start about what costs you will cover and how - if there is flexibility, discuss what method would suit them individually. Also provide individuals with the opportunity to tell you about any other financial barrier to participation they are experiencing and be clear about whether this cost can be covered or not.

8. Menu of reward, recognition and incentives

How you decide to reward, recognise or incentivise your experts-by-experience will depend on the exact needs and preferences of the individual or groups involved, as well as your budget. However, the menu below provides some recommendations and guidance for you to consider, alongside the appropriate financial value of certain participation activities. It is not an exhaustive list, but hopefully it will provide a useful framework for your discussions and decisions. For many experts-by-experience the intrinsic value of knowing they are making a difference or improving things for other people is the primary incentive to participate, and some will feel that they do not want any type of reward or recognition.

Vouchers/gift cards- there are a range of vouchers or gift cards available. Some can be used in a range of retailers both on-line and in-store. For example, "[Love to Shop](#)" and "[One4all](#)". Colleagues also offer Amazon vouchers, JD Sports vouchers and supermarket vouchers.

As well as being given to individuals, vouchers can be offered as a thank you to a group. For example, the Children in Care Council are provided with a higher value of vouchers and decide as a group how they would like to use it, for example, a bowling trip, a meal out, or go-karting.

Vouchers can also be used as a targeted incentive to complete a consultation survey or questionnaire, especially where the target group is seldom heard. For example, care leavers who completed an on-line survey to give their thoughts on a new strategy were offered a £10 voucher. Foster carers were recently offered the opportunity to enter a prize draw for a £25 Amazon voucher when they completed a questionnaire about their experience of using Contact Centres.

We recommend at least a £5 voucher, and no more than £50 for individuals. For a group consultation or one-off focus group, to be spent collectively, the value will depend on the service's/organisation's project budget.

Saying "thank you" - this can be informal and verbal, at the end of a one-off (for example, when providing feedback for a Quality of Practice Review), or ongoing activity (for example, involvement in recommissioning a service), or on-going throughout the project. A formal thank you letter from you, or where possible from the most senior decision maker (e.g. Head of Service, Director, Chief Executive); this recognises and shares the impact of the individual's or group's contribution to positive change.

Impact updates - it is essential to formally recognise and communicate the impact of the participation activity directly to those involved. This could be in the form of a letter (potentially included in a thank you letter) or short/one-page summary posted to participants. It could also be a display in a building where participants visit regularly, for example youth centres, family hubs and children's residential homes. Updates can also be shared through internal and external newsletters/bulletins, social media and staff noticeboards.

Celebration events - a powerful way to celebrate the impact and achievements of participation activity for all involved, including experts-by-experience and their families, participation and service staff and decision-makers. For example, the Youth Service organises the annual 4UTH celebration event, to share the stories of young people who have made a difference in their communities. Small-scale celebrations are also important and can include a special activity for a group, such as a meal or activity, including a section where the achievements and impact of the project are formally recognised.

Small gifts - small gifts are a simple, low cost and meaningful way to say thank you for participation, especially for younger children, where a voucher/gift card is not appropriate or for adults who feel a voucher or payment is not suitable for them. For example, the Contact Service offered small gifts such as fidget toys, slime and miniature cars to children who shared their views about their experiences of

family time, using a visual and creative activity as part of Listening and Learning Week 2024. A box of chocolates was given to a parent who attended a strategic board meeting on behalf of a parent forum.

Certificates and record of achievement - to formally recognise and provide a record of the individual's participation and achievements, as well as celebrate the impact of their contribution. The certificates could include the signature of a senior decision-maker. Certificates and examples of work (for example, posters, letters, reports) can be added to a personal portfolio and be helpful for future volunteering and employment opportunities.

Training, experience and accreditation - provide a longer-term and incredibly meaningful way to recognise and thank experts-by-experience. Training and experience gained in recruitment, project management, business support, film editing, peer mentoring or coaching and commissioning as part of participation activities benefit young people, parents and carers beyond the lifetime of the project. For example, when seeking volunteering and employment opportunities, and when setting up and running their own business or organisation. Where resources allow, consider accreditation schemes to formally recognise the skills, knowledge and experience gained; for example, apprenticeships, ASDAN, Arts Award and NVQs.

Work placements and experience - the opportunity for professional experience within your organisation demonstrates investment in the individual and is valuable to them in many ways. When offering an unpaid work experience placement consider the cost for the individual and discuss with them what support they might need to enable them to accept. For example, a young person who is living independently may be unable to afford to take time off from a paid job and may need an allowance to cover any lost income.

Involve participants in what they want any celebration or impact communications to look like.

9. Suggested value of reward and recognition vouchers/gift cards

The following provides some guidelines on appropriate values of vouchers/gift cards for a range of activities. This is to provide a balance between ensuring a consistent approach across the range of participation activities taking place within the Department, and the needs and expectations of the young people, parents and carers taking part. Your professional judgment, along with your knowledge of groups or individual experts-by-experience, should be used when deciding the appropriate value of vouchers/gift cards for your participation activity. It is a good idea to map out the expected time commitment from participants when planning the activity/project, and to differentiate between the time participants will be attending activities and any time required to prepare for or contribute to an activity in their "own time". For example, for planning a conference - speech, reading, researching, and creating marketing materials.

Recommended values for young people (up to age of 17):

- Half day attendance or preparation time - £25 (no more than 4 hours)
- Full-day attendance or preparation time - £50 (no more than 8 hours)

Recommended values for young adults, parents and carers (18+, 16–17-year-olds living independently)

- Half-day attendance or preparation time - £40 (no more than 4 hours)
- Full-day attendance or preparation time - £80 (no more than 8 hours)

Recommended values for all participants

- Short meetings (no more than 2 hours). For example, attending interview panel, attending strategic meeting for an agenda item, speaking at a conference - £10
- Group consultation/focus group session - £10 per participant to be spent as a group

Where your budget cannot offer the above value, think about what value you can offer. In any case, and if it is not possible, consider other ways to reward and recognise contributions as mentioned above. We know that experts-by-experience are not solely motivated by financial rewards, especially when an activity relates to their priorities or raises the profile of the group or provides other opportunities such as work experience or "freebies".

10. Conclusion/closing remarks

Overall, this guidance aims to offer a framework that provides consistency across participation activity, at the same time as taking a personalised approach to meet the varying needs of our experts-by-experience.

11. Further reading/resources

[Our Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation](#)

[Participation People's guide to recognising, rewarding and incentivising young people's volunteering](#)

[Nottinghamshire Co-production Community of Practice guide to remuneration, reward and recognition](#)

12. Useful contacts

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