



PLANNING BEST PRACTICE ENGAGEMENT WITH SURVIVOR ADVOCATES



This resource has been developed by Safe and Equal and is informed by the [Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework](#). Services will need to make their own determination as to the suitability of the information provided to their organisational context and adapt accordingly.



For information about ways in which Safe and Equal can support your organisation to embed lived experience in the design, delivery and evaluation of your services contact livedexperience@safeandequal.org.au

“The ones that stand out to me as good engagements, are the ones that prepare you, establish a safe and supportive environment and provide the opportunity for feedback”

This guide has been co-produced with the **Safe and Equal Expert Advisory Panel**, a panel of experienced survivor advocates with diverse backgrounds, expertise and perspectives. Use this guide to plan, deliver and reflect on your engagement with survivor advocates. The guide includes our direct quotes and an engagement checklist.

Drawing on our experiences working as survivor advocates, we reflected on the things that contribute to good engagements and the things that contribute to poor engagements.

 Do's Things that contribute to good engagements	 Don'ts Things that contribute to poor engagements
<p><i>“Ensuring we have all the information required to be informed. A checklist of who the audience is and what needs to be talked about.”</i></p> <p><i>“Take time to set up a supportive safe space.”</i></p> <p><i>“By sharing your pronouns and asking what pronouns they use, you will create safe space for the survivor.”</i></p> <p><i>“Providing opportunity for debriefing. Having access to a trauma informed support person from the organisation who knows us well or having the choice of bringing our own support person.”</i></p> <p><i>“To be involved in the process from the beginning and of course being adequately remunerated for our time.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Don't assume someone's gender by their appearance and use wrong pronouns. If you don't know what pronouns they use, just ask!”</i></p> <p><i>“When organisations take the positive feedback only and not the constructive feedback.”</i></p> <p><i>“When there are no considerations in place about triggers or safe space. For example, the impact of walking into a space and being confronted with uniformed Police. That's a big trigger for me.”</i></p> <p><i>“Any information can be detrimental and compromise safety. When we say we don't want our location to be disclosed, for some reason it gets disclosed anyway.”</i></p>

 Do's Things that contribute to good engagements	 Don'ts Things that contribute to poor engagements
<p><i>"Good engagements plan for how to manage disclosures. While we often get disclosure, this should not be the responsibility of survivor advocates."</i></p> <p><i>"Asking survivor advocates about triggers and boundaries and respecting those boundaries."</i></p> <p><i>"Allow us to determine what is safe and what is not safe. Ensure you are led by us as to how to support and maintain our safety throughout the engagement."</i></p> <p><i>"Providing flexibility and allowing to be human beings – being survivors it's not just something we are reading from a book, it's something we are living."</i></p> <p><i>"Being clear about how our information and experiences are going to be used and share –having transparency around that."</i></p> <p><i>"Understanding that lived experience is not the past tense but it is continuing – even though we may not be in a violent situation, the risk factors can be high."</i></p> <p><i>"Provide clear parameters or limitations. Articulating what you want and what you don't want is a matter of respect when it comes to engagement. This doesn't mean coming with all the answers, but ensuring there is clarity on the direction, outcomes or where you hope to get to."</i></p>	<p><i>"Having an engagement opportunity is not an invitation into my private life or for professionals to hunt me down on social media."</i></p> <p><i>"Not supporting new advocates. In the beginning I would disclose too many details of my story, there needs to be a level of understanding from the support person in where a survivor advocate is at in their journey."</i></p> <p><i>"Sometimes consulting with us is used like a checklist 'tick- we got their input' and they interpret our words to fit the answers they desire. That can have serious consequences."</i></p> <p><i>"Engagements that see us as only able to offer a story or case study feel tokenistic. We are more than our experiences of violence and abuse."</i></p> <p><i>"We don't like surprises."</i></p> <p><i>"Small things can have big impacts on power imbalances. For example, providing survivor advocates sticker name tags if the other participants are not wearing them."</i></p> <p><i>"When we don't receive feedback or hear about the outcome. Too often, we are forgotten after an engagement."</i></p>

For more guidance on supporting good engagements, refer to the best practice principles of the [Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework](#).



SURVIVOR ADVOCATE

ENGAGEMENT

CHECKLIST

Engagements with survivor advocates can take many forms, from one off events, workshops and focus groups to longer term co-production projects. Consider the time and resourcing you have available to determine the level of engagement and degree of influence you can offer. No matter the size or type of engagement, there are steps you can take to ensure it is a positive and meaningful experience.

Before the engagement

Explain the engagement opportunity

Introduce yourself – your name, role, pronouns and organisation.

Role – Outline the role of the advocate – facilitator, participant, speaker, panel member, consultant.

Time commitment – Number of anticipated hours, including preparation.

Remuneration – Payment amount and method. Will additional costs such as childcare or travel be covered?

Privacy and confidentiality – Share any limitations to privacy and confidentiality up front.

Audience – Describe who else will be involved or attending. E.g internal stakeholders, external stakeholders, other survivor advocates. Provide information on their role in family violence work and family violence literacy and awareness.

Topics and themes – Explain the topics that will be covered and the input you are seeking.

Influence and outcomes – Explain how their input will influence outcomes, the process for providing feedback and approval before outcomes are shared.

Recording – Outline if the engagement will be recorded, how it will be shared and who with.

Feedback – Outline how the survivor advocate can provide feedback about their engagement experience, and the processes that are in place to support this.

Questions – Invite the survivor advocate to ask questions or offer their suggestions.

Project brief – Confirm this information in a written project brief provided to the survivor advocate. Refer to the [Project Brief Template](#).

Discuss the survivor advocate's engagement needs and expectations.

Use the [My Engagement Needs and Expectations Form](#), developed by the Safe and Equal Expert Advisory Panel, to record this information.

Experience – What kind of advocacy experience and professional development have they had prior to this engagement?

Introductions – How would they like to be introduced (e.g. as a survivor advocate, as a speaker with lived experience of family violence)? Would they like to introduce themselves and their role? Are they acting as an independent advocate, or representing a group or network?

Access requirements – Explore access or support requirements E.g Auslan interpreter, interpreter, accessibility, breaks, how do they prefer to receive information, reminders or prompts, sending slides and questions in advance, technology requirements.

Safety – Are there any legal, physical, emotional or cultural safety considerations? If so, what support or protection can your organisation put in place to support engagement?

Privacy and confidentiality – How would they like their privacy and confidentiality to be maintained (use of first or full name, use of pseudonym, visibility of email address, use of image or recordings)? Develop a privacy and confidentiality agreement, including for what purpose their information will be used and for how long.

Environment – Explore what is needed to create a safe space, whether in person or online. This could include knowing who else will be in and have power in the space, how the space is set up, where the exits are located and having an agreed way to communicate if the person is uncomfortable.

Boundaries – Explore ways to uphold the survivor advocate's personal and professional boundaries and whether there are topics or themes they are not comfortable speaking about.

Support – What type of support would the advocate find useful? Pre-briefing and debriefing, support from your organisation, from other survivor advocates or their own support person.

Pre-briefing

Written information – Confirm the purpose, participants or audience and any agreed actions to support safe engagement and when you will be in touch after the event at least seven days before the engagement. This could include a run sheet, agenda or Terms of Reference.

Pre-meeting – Depending on the nature and scope of the engagement, explore the option of meeting beforehand to collaborate on planning and meet other contributors.



During the engagement

Welcome – Welcome the survivor advocate and introduce them the way you have agreed. Acknowledge them when they first enter the room, whether it is online or in-person.

Ways of working – Whether through a Terms of Reference or group agreement, set agreed ways of working and give permission to take a break or step out of the session if needed. Remain flexible and open. Be mindful that you might need to adapt your timelines or approach to support participation.

Language – Where possible, minimise jargon, acronyms and overt displays of hierarchy.

Power dynamics – Address power and hierarchy, for example the physical set up of the space or use of titles. Check out the Experts by Experience Framework video on addressing power imbalances when working with people with lived experience of family violence.

Audience engagement – Consider how much direct contact other event attendees or meeting participants will have with the advocate during the session, and whether additional supports need to be put in place. For example, if an audience has low level family violence awareness or literacy, it may be useful to have an extra colleague available to ensure the survivor advocate is not left unsupported at any point.

Discussions – In group discussions, be intentional in asking survivor advocates to contribute. Give permission to pass or come back to a question.

Disclosures – Ensure you have a plan to respond to disclosures of family violence and communicate what supports available for all participants. It should never be the responsibility of a survivor advocate to manage disclosures when engaging with a family violence service.

Respect – Respect the survivor advocate's time and start and finish engagements on time.

Thank you – Have a clear process for what the conclusion of the engagement looks like. Thank them for their contributions and the value they brought.



After the engagement

Debrief – Check in with the survivor after the engagement. Did anything occur during the engagement that impacted them? Did anything come up that could affect their legal, physical, emotional, and cultural safety? Ensure they are comfortable with what they shared, for example, was anything disclosed that they would like edited from a recording or submission? Ensure the time for debrief or time to decompress following an engagement is remunerated.

Invite Feedback – check in how they felt it went, ask if they have feedback about the session. Could anything have been done differently or better? You might consider multiple ways to provide feedback, with the option of anonymity.

Offer feedback – share your reflections on how the engagement went, what the survivor advocate did well, the value they contributed and constructive feedback.

Next steps – Confirm next steps, including how any outcomes from the engagement will be collated and shared. Confirm the process for remuneration including when they will receive payment.