



Participation Charter

Strengthening the Voice of Older People in Ireland

A collaboration between Age Action and the Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament
Supported by Community Foundation Ireland

Supporting meaningful participation, stronger representation,
and a greater voice for older people in public policy and public life

Age Action
Age Equality



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A practical charter for stronger participation

This Charter sets out shared principles for meaningful participation by older people in public policy formation. It aims to guide organisations and decision-makers in creating inclusive, respectful and transparent processes where older people's voices can genuinely shape decisions.

What it is	Why it matters	How to use it
A shared framework for meaningful participation by older people in public policy, advocacy and organisational decision-making.	Older people want to be heard, but they also want feedback, influence, accessibility and visible outcomes.	Use the ten principles as a practical checklist when planning, delivering or reviewing participation processes.

The core message

Older people should not only be consulted. They should have meaningful, accessible and sustained opportunities to shape the decisions that affect their lives, communities and society.

What older people highlighted

- Being listened to respectfully
- Receiving feedback on how views were used
- Having meaningful opportunities to contribute
- Better communication between organisations and older people
- Stronger collaboration across the age sector
- Accessible and inclusive participation routes

Access the full Charter

- This summary introduces the key messages and principles of the Participation Charter.
- The full Charter provides further context, practical guidance and detail on each principle.
- A separate Research and Evidence Base support the Charter and brings together the sources that informed its development.
- Access the full documents here:
 - [Participation Charter](#)
 - [Research and Evidence Base](#)

The Ten Principles of Meaningful Participation

The principles are designed to be read together. They support participation that is purposeful, inclusive, influential, accountable, collaborative and sustained.

1 Participation should be meaningful	2 Participation should be inclusive and accessible
3 Participation should begin early	4 Lived experience should be valued as evidence
5 Participation should influence decisions	6 Participation should lead to feedback and visible outcomes
7 Participation should strengthen collaboration and collective voice	8 Representation should be transparent and accountable
9 Participation should be sustained	10 Participation should promote civic engagement, rights and dignity

The Foundations of Participation

1

PARTICIPATION SHOULD BE MEANINGFUL

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Older people should have genuine opportunities to contribute to discussions, influence decisions, and help shape policies, services and initiatives that affect their lives.

IN PRACTICE

- Make the purpose of engagement clear.
- Be honest about what can and cannot be influenced.
- Create space for dialogue, not only one-way consultation.
- Show how contributions have been considered.

KEY MESSAGE

Participation should be a process through which older people can make a real contribution, not simply an activity.

2

PARTICIPATION SHOULD BE INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Participation opportunities should be designed to enable the widest possible range of older people to take part, regardless of circumstances, abilities, background or location.

IN PRACTICE

- Use plain language and accessible formats.
- Offer non-digital as well as digital options.
- Consider transport, timing, confidence, disability and caring responsibilities.
- Actively reach people whose voices are less often heard.

KEY MESSAGE

Accessibility is not an add-on. It must be built in from the beginning.

Shaping Better Decisions

3

PARTICIPATION SHOULD BEGIN EARLY

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Older people should be involved early enough to shape priorities, options and decisions, rather than being asked to react after decisions are already formed.

IN PRACTICE

- Invite input at planning stage.
- Allow older people to help identify issues and priorities.
- Avoid presenting participation as a rubber-stamp exercise.
- Keep people involved as ideas develop.

KEY MESSAGE

Early involvement gives participation a stronger chance to influence the direction of decisions.

4

LIVED EXPERIENCE SHOULD BE VALUED AS EVIDENCE

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

The lived experience of older people should be recognised as a valid and necessary form of evidence alongside research, data, policy and professional expertise.

IN PRACTICE

- Treat stories and practical experience as evidence, not anecdote.
- Combine lived experience with policy and data analysis.
- Use findings to shape advocacy and organisational priorities.
- Avoid extracting experiences without linking them to action.

KEY MESSAGE

People directly affected by decisions often see what systems, statistics and institutions miss.

From Voice to Impact

5

PARTICIPATION SHOULD INFLUENCE DECISIONS

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Participation should have a genuine opportunity to influence decisions, priorities, policies, services and actions.

IN PRACTICE

- Connect engagement to real decision-making processes.
- Explain where influence is possible.
- Use participation to shape priorities, proposals and actions.
- Record and communicate how input has informed decisions.

KEY MESSAGE

Participation matters when it can change, shape or strengthen what happens next.

6

PARTICIPATION SHOULD LEAD TO FEEDBACK AND VISIBLE OUTCOMES

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

People who participate should know what was heard, what changed, what did not change, and why.

IN PRACTICE

- Build feedback into every participation process.
- Share findings in clear and accessible language.
- Explain next steps and timescales.
- Be transparent when suggestions cannot be adopted.

KEY MESSAGE

Feedback closes the loop and helps build trust.

Building Trust and Collective Strength

7

PARTICIPATION SHOULD STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION AND COLLECTIVE VOICE

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Collaboration between organisations should strengthen the collective voice of older people and reduce duplication, fragmentation and consultation fatigue.

IN PRACTICE

- Coordinate engagement where appropriate.
- Share learning and avoid repeatedly asking the same questions.
- Work together when a united voice would strengthen influence.
- Use collaboration to amplify, not dilute, older people's voices.

KEY MESSAGE

A stronger collective voice can increase influence across policy, advocacy and public life.

8

REPRESENTATION SHOULD BE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Representation should be clear, accountable and connected to the people it seeks to represent.

IN PRACTICE

- Be clear about who is being represented and how views are gathered.
- Create regular opportunities to test positions with older people.
- Report back on outcomes and decisions.
- Make representation visible, understandable and trusted.

KEY MESSAGE

Representation is strongest when it is connected to ongoing dialogue and feedback.

Creating a Lasting Culture of Participation

9

PARTICIPATION SHOULD BE SUSTAINED

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Participation should be ongoing, not limited to one-off consultations or isolated engagement exercises.

IN PRACTICE

- Build long-term relationships and participation structures.
- Create ongoing opportunities for involvement.
- Resource participation as part of organisational practice.
- Review and improve participation over time.

KEY MESSAGE

Sustained participation builds trust, learning and stronger influence.

10

PARTICIPATION SHOULD PROMOTE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, RIGHTS AND DIGNITY

PRINCIPLE STATEMENT

Participation should promote civic engagement, rights, dignity, inclusion and voice, recognising older people as active members of society with valuable contributions to make.

IN PRACTICE

- Support participation in civic, community, cultural and public life.
- Promote dignity, equality and inclusion in all engagement.
- Remove barriers that prevent equal participation.
- Recognise older people's contribution across a broad range of policy issues.

KEY MESSAGE

Participation is not only about better decisions; it is also about dignity, belonging and the right to contribute.

Embedding participation in organisational practice

The Charter is most useful when it becomes part of everyday planning, not a document that sits separately from organisational work. These prompts can be used before, during and after participation activity.

Before participation	During participation	After participation
• What are we asking, and why? • What can participants influence? • Who might be missing? • What barriers do we need to remove?	• Is the process respectful and accessible? • Are people able to discuss, not only respond? • Are different views being heard? • Are we recording insights clearly?	• What did we hear? • What changed or will change? • What did not change, and why? • How will we report back?

Quick participation checklist

- ✓ Purpose is clear
- ✓ Influence is real and honestly explained
- ✓ Access needs and non-digital options are considered
- ✓ Seldom-heard voices are actively included
- ✓ Lived experience is treated as evidence
- ✓ Feedback is planned from the start
- ✓ Representation routes are transparent
- ✓ Learning is captured and used to improve future practice

Evidence base and foundations

The Participation Charter is informed by the views and experiences of older people and supported by Irish, European and international policy, human rights and participation frameworks. The following sources provided the foundation for the Charter's principles. A full version of the Participation Charter is also available.

Primary lived-experience foundation

- National Consultation on Participation and Public Policy Formation / “Strengthening the Voice of Older People” project

Participation and engagement frameworks

- Public Participation Networks
- Older People's Councils
- Participation and the Practice of Rights
- Children's Participation Action Plan 2024-2028

Irish policy, equality and rights frameworks

- National Positive Ageing Strategy
- Citizens' Assembly on Ageing
- Commission on Care for Older People
- Age Friendly Ireland Framework
- Social Justice Ireland publications on citizenship, participation and inclusion
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 / Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

International frameworks

- WHO Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Framework
- WHO Healthy Ageing Framework
- United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030
- Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing
- EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 25
- European Social Charter, Article 23

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