

Tip sheet



RESOURCE
& SUPPORT
HUB



Engaging survivors of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH)

This tip sheet is a quick reference for understanding good practice when engaging survivors of SEAH in policy making.¹ It provides a list of key points and questions that organisations should be asking when working with survivors.

Survivors can make important contributions to policymaking on sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH). However, meaningful engagement involves policymakers acting appropriately and responsibly to ensure that survivors' voices are heard without causing further harm.

Why engage survivors?

- ✓ Organisations have an ethical and moral responsibility to take the views and experiences of survivors seriously
- ✓ Survivors are experts by experience and know more than anyone what works and what does not
- ✓ Inputting into policy and change can assist survivors with their recovery and help them feel valued
- ✓ Engaging survivors can ensure that work is relevant and effective
- ✓ Staff and organisations will be better at their roles when they understand SEAH from a survivor's point of view

When not to engage survivors?

- ✗ If survivors are still at immediate risk from the perpetrator(s)
- ✗ If your organisation does not have correct policy and procedures to safeguard and protect survivors and whistle-blowers both during engagement and after
- ✗ If engaging will cause harm or put survivors at risk of harm both from perpetrators, communities or governments (E.g. repercussions for speaking up such as imprisonment or loss of legal status)
- ✗ If the engagement is purely to benefit the organisation and not survivor-centred
- ✗ If your organisation has no intention of trying to implement the recommendations from survivors

Useful definitions:

Survivor-centred approach: Ensuring that prevention and response are non-discriminatory and respect and prioritise the rights, and needs and wishes of survivors, including groups that are particularly at risk or may be specifically targeted for SEAH.²

Survivor-led approach: An approach that equips and empowers survivors to take a leadership role in their own life and in the larger movement against the form of abuse and/or exploitation they have endured and overcome.³

Trauma-informed approach: An approach that recognises the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery. This includes recognising the signs and symptoms of trauma; fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures and practices and actively aiming to prevent re-traumatization.⁴

The table below is meant to guide organisations through planning survivor engagement. This is not an extensive list but is meant to facilitate thinking about what survivor engagement entails.

Create a safe and accessible environment



Ensure safeguarding measures are in place for survivors and whistle-blowers. Are your safeguarding policy and procedures up to date and relevant? Do you have a process to support survivors if there is a disclosure during or after engagement?

Ensure safety planning is implemented. Have you conducted a risk assessment of the engagement? Have you worked with survivors and staff/facilitators to develop personal safety plans during and after the engagement?

Ensure that support is available for survivors if they are affected by anything during the consultation. What services are needed? Who do you need to network or engage with? Have you considered special measures for children? Have you considered how services will be paid for?

Ensure the environment is accessible and inclusive. How are you including survivors from different areas or backgrounds? How are you supporting survivors to access transport to the meeting place? How will you support parents with childcare, individuals with disabilities or other groups to engage?

Ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Are survivors at risk of being identified attending the engagement? Are you anonymising any work and removing any identifiable elements to personal experiences?

Engaging with sensitivity, understanding and reflection



Processes should be survivor-led and designed. Have you considered how survivors can lead and take on roles in designing the engagement and policy and programmes in way that does not cause further harm? Have you asked survivors what methods work for them?

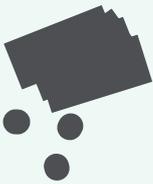
Ensure informed consent is received for any engagement and images, quotes or written work that is used. Have you explained what the engagement entails and explained consent in a way in which the survivor understands? Have you explained that they can stop engaging at any time? Have you explained how any images, quotes or written work will be used and who will see them? Is any work going to be online or printed in a public document?

Be clear, truthful and realistic with expectations. Are you being realistic about what you can achieve with the resources and timeframe you have? Are you being clear about what is expected from the engagement? Is the survivor clear about your role and any limitations there are? Have you said you will call, text or send information? If so, make sure you do.

Communication should be clear and friendly before and after the process. Is the communication with survivors making them feel at ease? Have you explained the process, what will happen and any follow up needed? Is your voice and body language friendly? Have you reflected on your own prejudices and biases and how that may affect communication with individuals?

Provide different options for survivors to choose how they want to engage. Have you considered different ways of engaging survivors (written work, audio, art based etc)? Does the survivor understand the different options and different roles or input they can have?

Resourcing and flexibility



Ensure you are realistic about staffing and timing for engaging survivors. Have you got enough qualified workers to support engagement, especially when working with children and individuals living with disabilities? Have you included contingency planning for unexpected changes? E.g.: What if a survivor pulls out last minute, but wants to engage? Can you rebook a session?

Consider cost of engagement. Are you providing meals to cover engagement? Are there venue costs? Do you need break out space for time out or smaller discussions? Do you need translators?

Financially compensate for survivors' expertise. Are you paying survivors for their time? Are you reimbursing any travel and accommodation costs (survivors may need this in advance to get to the meeting place)? Are you providing childcare or childcare costs?

¹ This tip sheet has been adapted from a report written for the Resource and Support Hub : RSH (2020) Best practice in engaging survivors of sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEAH). <https://safeguardingsupporthub.org/best-practice-engaging-survivors-sexual-exploitation-abuse-and-sexual-harassment>

² Boezio, G., n.d. Landmark UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019) strengthens justice and accountability and calls for a survivor-centered approach in the prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence, 29 April 2019. United Nations https://slavfreetoday.org/journal_of_modern_slavery/v2i1a2_Rise_Unite_Support_Doing_No_Harm_in_the_AntiTrafficking_Movement_countryman_rosewurm.pdf

³ Countryman-Roswurm, K. (2015). Rise, unite, support: Doing "no harm" in the anti-trafficking movement. Slavery Today Journal: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Human Trafficking Solutions, 2, 1. URL

https://slavfreetoday.org/journal_of_modern_slavery/v2i1a2_Rise_Unite_Support_Doing_No_Harm_in_the_AntiTrafficking_Movement_countryman_rosewurm.pdf

⁴ Mentalhealth.org (2015) Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Interventions. Accessed 04.08.20 URL <https://www.mentalhealth.org/get-help/trauma#:~:text=Recognizes%20the%20signs%20and%20symptoms,actively%20resist%20re%20traumatization.%22>