

2.7 Involving traditionally excluded groups

It is important that every tenant has the opportunity to participate. However there are particular groups that are under-represented in mainstream participation structures, for example minority ethnic communities, young people, tenants with support needs, and older tenants in supported accommodation. Identifying and engaging with these groups is crucial to successful tenant participation. Landlords and tenant groups need to be proactive and put arrangements in place specifically to involve traditionally excluded groups. Case study examples of involving excluded groups are in Section 5 of this guide and more general advice is given below and in the Community Engagement How To Guide (www.ce.communitiesscotland.gov.uk).

Identifying the needs of excluded groups

Research has highlighted the importance of developing links between excluded tenants. Making these links can be very important in building the confidence of isolated individuals and in strengthening the position of traditionally excluded groups in participation processes. This may involve tapping into networks beyond the immediate local area. These include advocacy organisations, religious and cultural groups. Working with organisations that act as advocates for particular groups enables landlords to:

- identify and address issues likely to impact on the participation of excluded groups;
- work with organisations who have established the trust of excluded groups;
- use existing structures to contact excluded individuals;
- help to make links between particular groups and individual tenants.

Landlords can also use their own methods to build up data about the needs of their tenants who have traditionally been excluded. For example, when new tenants sign their Scottish Secure Tenancy this can be used as an opportunity to gather equalities information, and details about their preferred means of communication and involvement.

Removing barriers

Many of the barriers facing excluded individuals are the same as those facing other tenants, for example access to information, self-confidence, time or location of meetings. However some tenants face additional barriers. Steps can be taken to remove these barriers to participation, and many landlords across Scotland have undertaken some or all of the following basic measures:

- where required, making information available in appropriate formats, including Braille, audio and videotape, CD-rom and community languages;
- holding events in venues that are accessible to those with physical disabilities;
- providing transport to and from events;
- using venues that are used by community organisations working with excluded groups;
- tapping into cultural events;

- holding meetings and events at suitable times*;
- using information technology to communicate with those living in remote areas or those with mobility difficulties;
- providing crèche facilities and offering carer allowances.

*This includes holding events at different times to get around varying schedules (including shift work and full-time work) and preferences (for example some individuals may not like going out in the evenings). It's important that you also take into account religious festivals when planning events.

An equally important barrier to the participation of traditionally excluded groups is the feeling of isolation and lack of confidence often felt by individuals. These barriers can be addressed through the development of trusting and supportive relationships between staff and individual tenants, and between existing tenant groups and individual tenants.

Separate but integrated participation structures

It is essential that equal opportunities are promoted within all 'mainstream' participation structures and activities. However, minority or excluded groups may feel isolated and lack confidence, and in some cases this may be made worse by the attitudes of other members of the community towards them. One way that landlords can get help is to establish specific participation initiatives aimed at these groups. These can include one-off events, such as social events and outings for young or older tenants, or establishing longer-lasting structures for participation.

Traditionally excluded groups may wish to establish a distinctive collective voice through alternative forms of participation and landlords should seek to facilitate this. But it is equally important that careful thought is given to how this fits with wider participation structures, to ensure that excluded groups do not become structurally isolated.

For further advice and information on involving traditionally excluded groups please see the case studies at the back of this guide. For further advice on involving minority ethnic individuals see also section 2.8.