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# WORKING TOGETHER

getting started with co-production



**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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# WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

We've made this guide for anyone involved or interested in becoming involved in co-producing services with Oxfordshire County Council. This could be citizens or staff working for or with local authorities, the NHS, or providers of care.

The guide explains what co-production is and how it could look and work in practice.

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*'Working Together - getting started in co-production,'* partly replaces the handbook published by Co-production Oxfordshire in 2020. We have co-designed its replacement. Much of the content herein owes its origins to the original handbook (which was co-produced), although it has been re-worked and presented in a different way.

A new *'Co-pro Toolkit'* has also been produced. It is a set of stand alone briefing documents designed to support co-productivity in action.

# WHAT IS CO-PRODUCTION?

CO

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PRODUCE

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CO-PRODUCE

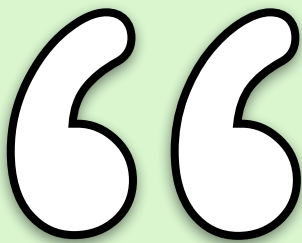
*together*

*make*

*Make together*

There are many definitions of co-production that have been written over the years, in this country and abroad. What they all have in common is the recognition that citizens who access services, and their families and carers, have the expertise and skills, gained through their own experience, to help innovate and improve council services.

What makes co-production special is that stakeholding citizens (that's people who are affected in a good way or bad way by existing services) are invited to meet and work with professionals on an equal footing. Together they can create improvements to an existing service (or design an entirely new project) and then influence the way it is run and evaluated for the benefit of the community.



**Co-production is the process where providers and/or professionals and stakeholding citizens equally share a whole-life responsibility for the creation and delivery of products, services or knowledge. Co-production is underpinned by the principles of equality, diversity, access and reciprocity.**

The Oxfordshire definition of co-production.



# THE PRINCIPLES OF CO-PRODUCTION.

## Equality

The start point is that no one group or person is more important than any other. So, all have assets to bring to the table.

## Diversity

A properly co-produced project demonstrates inclusivity. Don't solely rely on interest groups as this can lead to exclusion.

co-production

## Access

A fully co-produced service ensures that everyone has the same opportunity to take part in an activity fully, in the way that suits them best.

## Reciprocity

Ensures that people receive something back for putting something in, building on the desire to feel needed and valued.

The  
Principles of  
Co-production.

Principles are a set of rules or laws that govern actions. They tend to be unchanging and universal. The principles that underpin co-production are equality, diversity, accessibility and reciprocity. We argue, that all four principles are critical for putting co-production into practice. If we can show inclusivity at the heart of our co-productive practice, we can celebrate its authenticity.

## EQUALITY.

Co-production starts from the idea that no one group or

person is more important than any other group or person. So, everyone is equal and everyone has assets to bring to the process. Assets refer to skills, abilities, time and other qualities that people may have that are useful to the process. This is different from approaches that focus on people's difficulties and what they cannot do.

So, everyone brings assets to a co-productive process that should be used and valued.

## **DIVERSITY.**

Following on from equality we segway seamlessly into diversity. Co-production should be as inclusive as possible. This can be challenging but it is important that co-production projects are proactive about diversity.

It is known from many studies some groups are persistently under-represented or excluded from most forms of participatory work with local authorities, it's not unreasonable to assume this goes for co-productive processes too.

The main groups likely to experience exclusion are:

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic people;
- LGBT+ people;
- people who communicate differently;
- people with dementia;
- older people who need a high level of support;
- people who are not affiliated to any organised group.

Don't forget that where someone lives may also create barriers to inclusion:

- Gypsies and Travellers;
- Homeless people;
- People in prison;
- People living in residential homes;
- Young people living in rural areas.

## **ACCESS.**

Co-productive processes need to be accessible - there should be true equality of opportunity. People should be able to participate in the way that suits them best.

Most of us consider physical access as a matter of course, but making sure that information is accessible and that it is provided in appropriate formats is equally important. Some language can be problematic because it involves jargon that is inaccessible (including a lot of the words frequently used in co-productive practice). Ensure that all who participate understand the word co-productivity and its implications.

**Co-production is about building relationships that are truly power-sharing and equal.**



Everyone needs to have enough information to take part in a co-productive process. There may be legal issues that impact on your work. Confidentiality and strict adherence to rules around information sharing must be observed. It's good practice to try to identify these barriers beforehand and look to resolve the issues before you embark on your co-productive journey.

Another important aspect of accessibility is time and timing, which can be overlooked. Is enough time given to a meeting agenda or factored into a project plan for co-production to be fully embraced?

Shift things up a bit - ensure that meetings are regularly held on different days of the week and at different times. This will enable most people to participate most of the time.

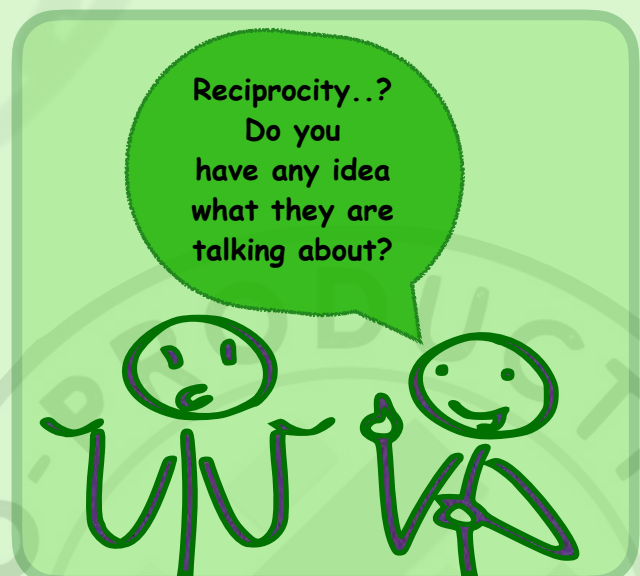
## **RECIPROCITY.**

Reciprocity has been defined as ensuring that people receive something back for putting something in, and builds on people's desire to feel needed and valued.

Everyone has assets and those assets are part of the individual's 'social capital'. If

they invest some of their social capital, they should expect a return. This could be in the form of recognition, invitations to high profile events, training, time credits and other opportunities. The idea has its roots in mutuality: all parties involved have responsibilities and expectations to each other.

As with most words used in co-productive practice 'reciprocity' may be considered as jargon. It isn't a particularly accessible, word. It is usually better to outline the concept in plain English, than dwell on the word.



## **WORDS, WORDS, WORDS.**

Have a look at our video on the Oxfordshire County Council website which should help you get to grips with some of the technical words used in co-production.  
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

# HOW DOES CO-PRODUCTION FIT IN?

One of the main questions people ask when starting to do co-production is 'How is co-production different to engagement, consultation and other types of interaction?' A national organisation called Think Local Act Personal (TLAP) adapted an original American model of the various forms of interaction and how they relate to each other. You can see from the diagram that they form a staircase, starting with coercion and running up to co-production.

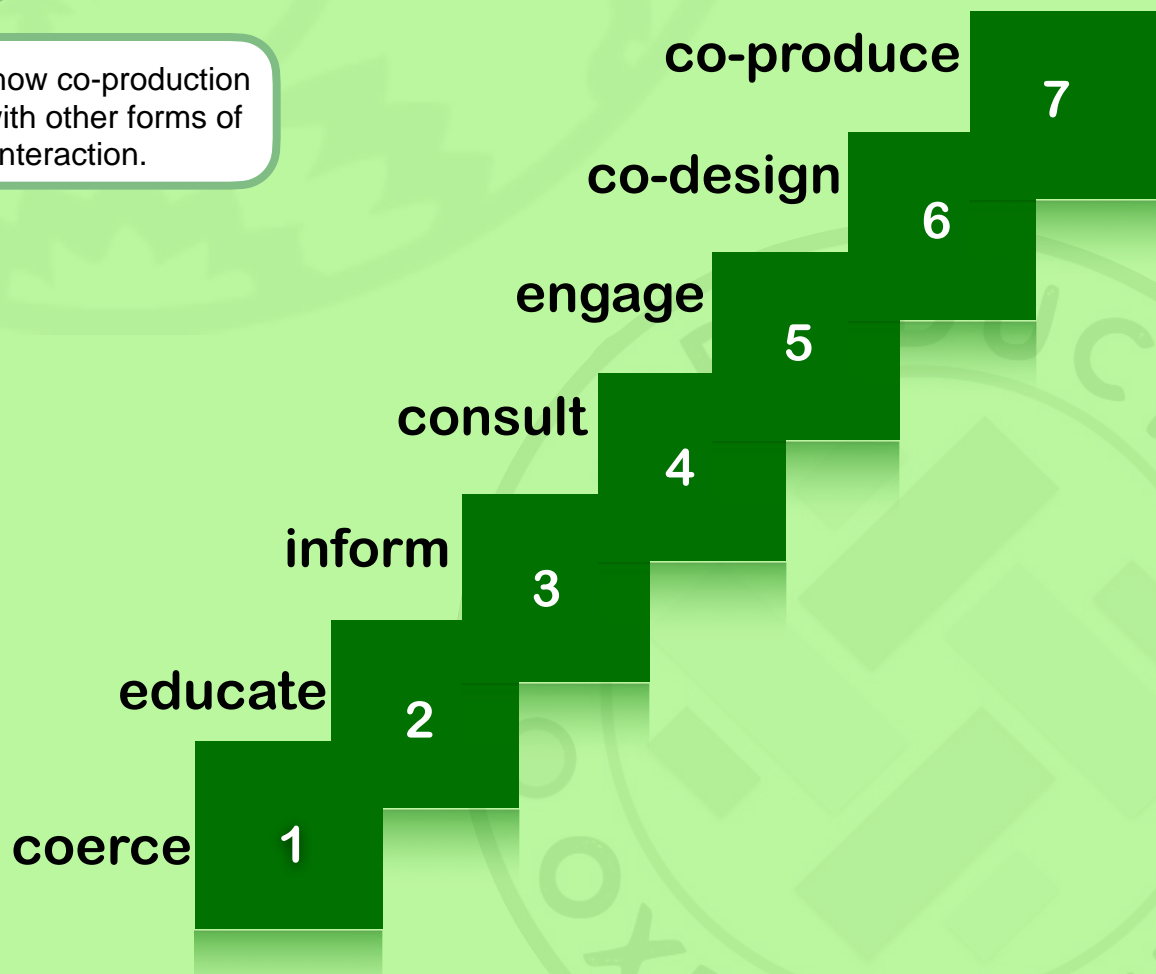
## 1. COERCE.

Back in the day this is how all local government services were done. One size fits all, with a possible penalty if you didn't abide by the rules. We don't like to work in this way these days.

## 2. EDUCATE.

An attempt is made to help citizens understand the service and know how they may find out more should they need to.

This is how co-production fits in with other forms of interaction.





### 3. **INFORM.**

The service provider tells citizens about what is available and explain how it works. This may include telling people what decisions have been made about the service and why.

### 4 **CONSULT.**

Citizens may be asked to complete questionnaires, be involved in surveys or attend meetings. A consultation does not give the power to resist or affect change.

### 5. **ENGAGE.**

Those who currently use services are given more opportunities to express their views and may be able to influence some decisions, but this depends on what the providers of the service will allow. Therefore the power relationship is not equal.

### 6. **CO-DESIGN.**

Citizens with experience of a service become involved in designing improvements or totally new services, based on their experiences and ideas. There is genuine influence for service users who become involved in a co-design process, but they have not been involved for the whole lifetime of the service.

### 7. **CO-PRODUCE.**

An equal relationship between people who use services and the people responsible for planning and delivering services. They work together, from beginning to end: design to delivery, sharing strategic decision-making about policies, as well as planning the best way to deliver services.

je participe  
tu participes  
il participe  
nous participons  
vous participez  
ils profitent



This French student poster (Spring 1968) was used as figure 1 in Sherry Arnstein's paper which gave rise to our staircase of interaction.

*In English:*

*"I participate; you participate; he participates; we participate; you participate... They profit."*

Her point ? "There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process."

Arnstein S. R., (1969).



# CO-PRODUCTION OR FAUX PRODUCTION?

Understanding what co-production isn't, is as important as understanding what it is. For example David Boyle and Michael Harris say co-production is not: consultation, volunteering, or individual budgets in their discussion paper 'The challenge of co-production' [Pages 16 – 18]. The following table sets out some more of what is and isn't co-production:

What co-production is and what it isn't.	
Co-production is:	Co-production isn't:
Partners respecting each other and valuing each other's perspective and contribution.	Awarding a contract with a voluntary organisation to deliver public services.
Working together from the very start to identify and achieve an end result which is equally and collaboratively agreed on.	Service user involvement in assessing services.
Allowing time so that all parties can listen to each other and understanding where everyone is coming from and arriving at an understanding of the particular challenges they face.	Consultation i.e. having a plan and then going out and about to tell people about it OR even having a plan, asking people their view of the proposals and then incorporating their thoughts into the revised plan.
All parties respecting the limitations that may affect a co-productive process, these may be for example: economics, statutory regulations, ethics & equality of civic rights.	One party persistently insisting another comes around to their way of thinking with the implied threat of withdrawing from the process. 'Drawing lines in the sand'.
Valuing, learning from and building on the diversity of assets held by the group: skills, experience, knowledge, time and networks.	By its nebulous, evolving nature, a quick fix. It requires the investment of time and resources.
Working in ways that foster a culture of inclusion, where participation is in a manner that best meets the needs of each member of the group.	Identifying, classifying and listing problems with the expectation that solutions will be found by someone else.
Sharing ownership for developing solutions that are evidence based, work and are deliverable.	A way of getting your agenda on the table - maybe by attempting to avoid democratic processes ie. Council committees/cabinet.
Sharing ownership of problems that arise and a commitment to collaboratively find solutions.	An arms length process for abrogating responsibility when confronted with problems or failure.
Professionals transitioning to working as service facilitators, not service deliverers.	A new tick box piece of evidence to demonstrate performance and impact.

## WHY SHOULD WE CO-PRODUCE?

Oxfordshire County Council is now leading the way by embedding real, sustainable co-production throughout all appropriate services, which is rigorously monitored and evaluated. Jargon aside, this means that Oxfordshire citizens and their families will sit alongside Council professionals and design and run services that deliver for them and the wider community.

”

Stephen Chandler  
Oxfordshire County  
Council.

Citizens who engage with Oxfordshire County Council services have, over a period of time, developed knowledge and skills as a result of their lived experience - they have become 'Experts by Experience'. The process of co-production puts experts by experience and professional staff together in a power-sharing team.

The synergy of co-productivity, or the extra benefit that is achieved by two or more elements working together, can bring a range of benefits and improvements for all concerned. The benefits we achieve by working in this way fall into two groups: instrumental or intrinsic.

**1+1=3 : SYNERGY OF CO-PRODUCTION**

“When the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

### **INSTRUMENTAL BENEFITS.**

e.g. Experts by Experience can contribute their knowledge and skills leading to greater efficiency and better use of resources.

### **INTRINSIC BENEFITS.**

e.g. Providers involved in co-production gain a stronger focus on the outcomes of the support provided and potentially a greater focus on prevention.

## **THE CARE ACT 2014.**

We assume that the authors of the definition used in the Statutory Guidance for the Care Act (2014) had a full understanding of what has become an established view of co-production when they were penning the document (definitions vary from place to place but they all draw on the same fundamentals). It makes clear that it is primarily people who draw on care and support, carers, friends and the wider community that should be involved in co-production. Co-production is also championed in relation to information, advice and advocacy, assessment, market shaping, developing local strategies and plans.



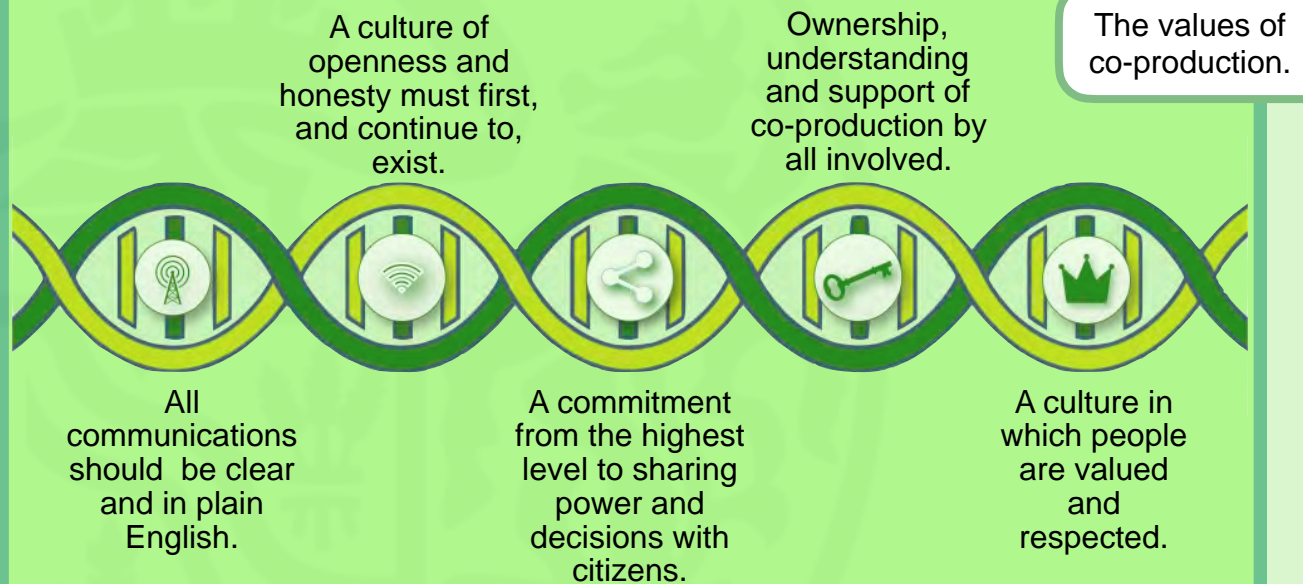
**Local authorities should, where possible, actively promote participation in providing interventions that are co-produced with individuals, families, friends, carers and the community.**

**Co-production is when an individual influences the support and services received, or when groups of people get together to influence the way that services are designed, commissioned and delivered.**

Care Act 2014  
Statutory  
Guidance.



# CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT.



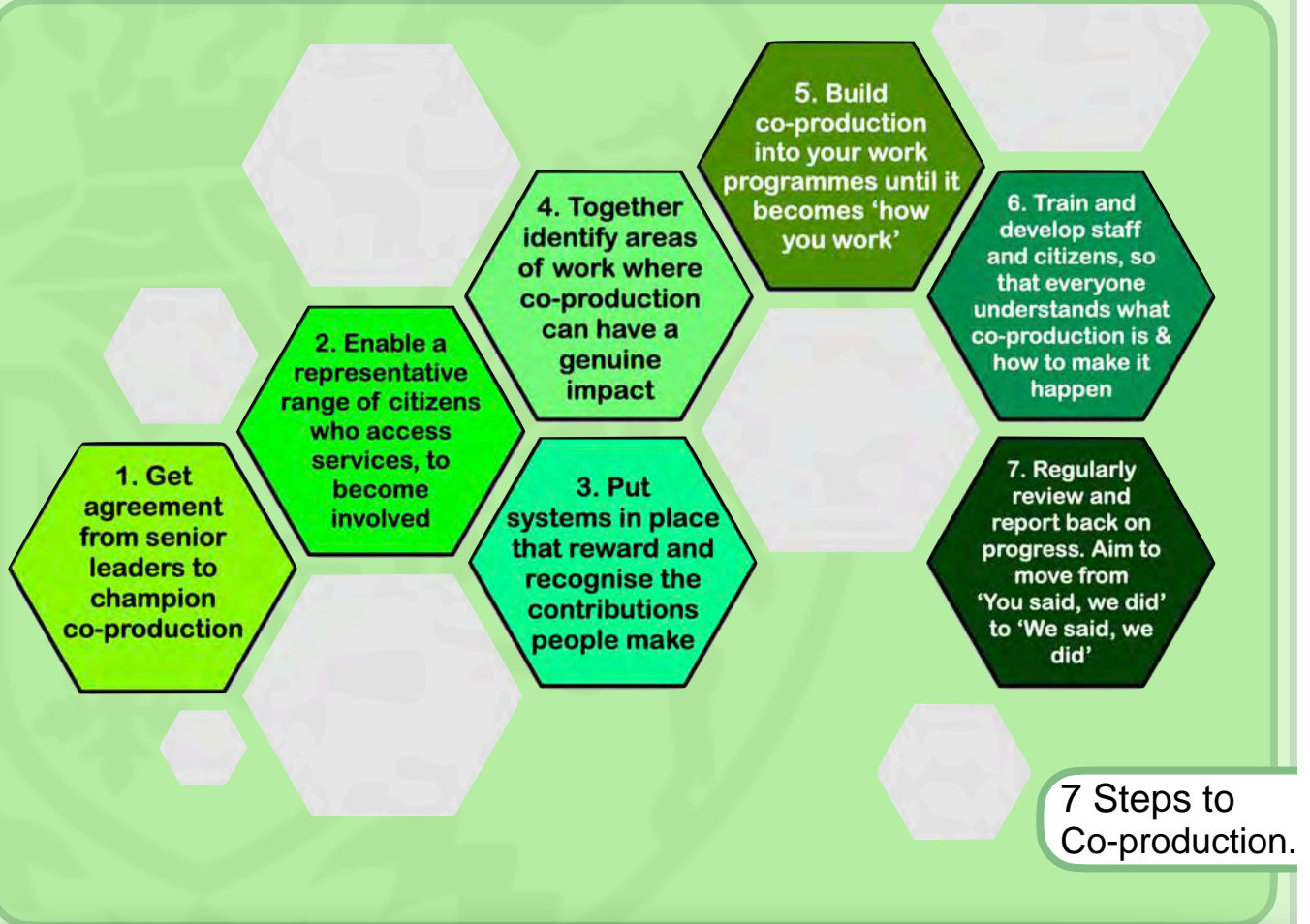
Co-production relies on everyone working to a set of values (first identified by Coalition for Collaborative Care) that produce an outcome that works for all - you could say it's co-productive DNA. While the experiences of co-production may vary, the values that weave through effective co-production are quite consistent. Values are the qualities or standards that govern our behaviour and may evolve over time.



**It goes well beyond the idea of 'citizen engagement' or 'service user involvement' to foster the principle of equal partnership. It offers to transform the dynamic between the public and public service workers, putting an end to 'them' and 'us'. Instead, people pool different types of knowledge and skills, based on lived experience and professional learning...**

New Economics  
Foundation.

# LET'S GO CO-PRO!



## SOME USEFUL TIPS.

### Co-chairing, facilitation and coaching skills.

Working in an inclusive and co-productive way requires a range of skills and abilities. Look out for Co-production Oxfordshire Training events and make sure you're part of the action!

### Clear communication – plain English - no jargon.

It should be no surprise that the way we communicate with others is important. It is all too easy to slip into our own way of saying things, or to assume prior knowledge. Please avoid prefixing "co-" to every possible word going - it's unnecessary and confusing.

### Learning, reflecting and improving.

Co-production can feel uncomfortable – it is an ongoing process of assessing how we can work ever better together.

### **Involving the right people at the right time.**



It can take time to build trust and give all the proper and equal opportunity to participate. Planning for this is important to ensure that a wide range of relevant people can get involved in co-producing services.

### **Being patient and listening well.**



Respect and value others' contributions and truly listen. Everyone involved should feel their voice is heard and views are included throughout the process.

### **Awareness of, and adjusting to, other people's needs.**



Knowing the needs and wants of all those involved and how to meet them is important. This means that people can be involved equally, at the right time.

### **Ability to share power.**



Sharing power means entering an equal partnership, in so far as possible, and sometimes letting go. It can involve sharing resources and decisions and is rooted in a deep appreciation and value of the particular skills and abilities that all participants can contribute.

**Any Questions?  
Get in touch!**

If you're interested in becoming involved in **Co-production Oxfordshire** or if you need an electronic copy of our **Co-pro Toolkit** please contact the Co-production Staff Team.

The Oxfordshire Co-production Staff Team can be contacted by emailing:  
**[coproduction@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:coproduction@oxfordshire.gov.uk)**



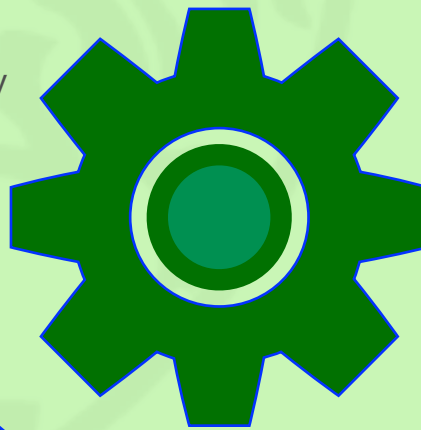


# CO-PRODUCTION OXFORDSHIRE.

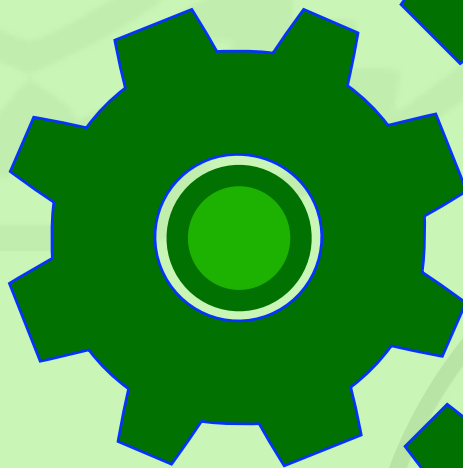


In 2016 Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) decided it wanted to make co-production its normal way of working. It asked Social Care Institute for Excellence for support and they ran some workshops and invited a mixture of people who use services, carers, families and staff to co-produce some suggestions for how co-production could become the way OCC works. Co-production Oxfordshire started its work in September 2017. There are now four elements to Co-production Oxfordshire: An Advisory Board, The Ambassadors' Network, A small team of OCC Staff and the Community of Practice.

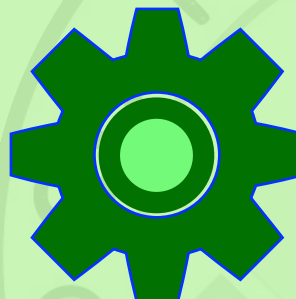
An **Advisory Board** of experts by experience takes a look at the work of the Council and collectively offer advice on how co-production may be applied to services.



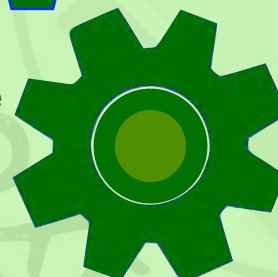
Our powerhouse is the **Ambassadors' Network** of professionals and experts by experience who promote co-production and run training sessions and advice clinics.



An OCC **Staff Team** work with the Ambassadors, the Board and the Community of Practice, supporting and organising activity for Co-production Oxfordshire.



The **Community of Practice** is a group of people who have a common interest in the domain of co-production. They collaborate, improve their skills, and actively work on advancing co-production.



The four elements of Co-pro Oxon.

# SOME SELF TEST QUESTIONS.

Four teasers for you. If you're reading a paper version, turn the page up-side-down to reveal the answer or if you're viewing online as a pdf, use the rotate feature to view the answer.

Q1. How does co-production differ from engagement?

A1. Co-production and engagement are both forms of interaction. The difference between co-production and other forms of interaction is the beginning to end sharing of power equally between professionals and citizens who are experts by experience. Engagement does not guarantee an equal relationship with power.

Q2. On what step of the Staircase of Interaction would you be if the local council was asking people to complete questionnaires, be involved in surveys or attend meetings?

A2. You would be on step 4 where consultation is the form of interaction. The views of people are being sought about a service or project. However, this is as far as it goes - there is no further contact until the results are published as evidence on the introduction of a new service. Citizens do not have any power to challenge or influence the specification or design of a new service.

Q3. How may we reward and recognise the contributions that experts by experience make to the process?

A3. Reciprocity rewards could take the form of time credits, formal recognition, training and educational courses. Out-of-pocket expenses are separate from reciprocal rewards.

Q4. What are the barriers to equally sharing power between professionals and citizens who are experts by experience?

A4. It's important that everyone is aware of sharing power. Assuming that you have senior management support, other barriers could be: budget constraints, legal and statutory duties of the Council, and democratic procedural requirements.

“BE AWARE: The term ‘co-production’ is occasionally used in policy circles to mean no more than consultation...”

Professor Edgar Stuart Cahn.

“Working Together - getting started with co-production”

First co-produced and published in 2020  
as “Co-production Oxfordshire’s Working Together - Handbook”.

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Think Local Act Personal (TLAP)  
The Lab  
UK Government

...and all of those who have been involved in Co-production Oxfordshire, past and present.



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