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+ *Uncertain Futures*

A Guide to Community Activism and Participatory Research

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Introduction: What is Participatory Research?

Participatory research is becoming recognised across disciplines as a resourceful method for empowering communities to co-create knowledge, ensuring that research is relevant, inclusive, and creates meaningful, sustainable change. There is a vast array of excellent resources available which can guide researchers and community organisations through the process of developing a successful participatory research project. Such toolkits support researchers to develop trusting relationships and ensure active participation by all the relevant stakeholders and participants. These resources are invaluable in encouraging both researchers and policy makers to consider using participatory research methods more regularly.

This guide is different and does not aim to replicate these existing invaluable resources. It has been developed over the course of a live participatory research project capturing the unique experiences of the team involved. It focuses on the hidden processes and impacts which essentially become the legacy of participatory research and explores how these can be successfully achieved. It is structured around the potential impacts of participatory research: **peer support and development; capacity building; dialogue creation; knowledge exchange; amplifying voices; and informing policy and practice**.

In this guide, you will find:

+ Six clear impact-directed sections focusing on peer support and development, capacity building, creating dialogue, amplifying voices, knowledge exchange and informing policy and practice.
+ Identification of the key principles and practices necessary to achieve successful impact.
+ Tips on overcoming the challenges presented in striving for these impacts.
+ Insightful commentary from those who have been intimately involved as stakeholders in the process of participatory research (e.g. diverse, black-led community organisations, cultural organisations, local government, artists and researchers).
+ Recognition of intersectionality and the multiple diverse voices and experiences within communities themselves

We hope that this guide will inspire others to take up the challenge of embarking with participatory research methodologies by emphasising the myriad of rich benefits of such work, providing support in overcoming potential obstacles and accentuating the manner in which such research can become a powerful tool for social, economic, political and cultural change.

The Project: *Uncertain Futures* in brief:

Uncertain Futures is a co-produced **art research project**. This work originated through an art commission by Manchester Art Gallery of artist Suzanne Lacy, a renowned socially engaged artist whose work explores experiences of marginalisation such as gender, race, ethnicity and age. Lacy's work is always in collaboration with communities, other artists and often other stakeholders such as researchers and policymakers. The project started by bringing on board researchers from both Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Manchester to begin generating the outline of the work. An initial consultation was undertaken across the city, that led to a clear focus for the project: work, gender, inequalities, and age, as issues relevant to the local populus.

Later, through the participatory design of the project a research question was established: What are the experiences of and relationships to work for women over 50 in Manchester? This research methodology was underpinned by an intersectional framework and a life-course approach to explore inequalities experienced across the life-course in relation to work and the impact on work and retirement in later life. There were four key areas explored within interviews with research participants: **Access to work; in-work experiences; exiting work and retirement; the impact of Covid-19**. The project has run from December 2019 to March 2025. Find out more about the project by visiting the website, and downloading the research report, or through watching the documentary film (uncertainfuturesproject.co.uk).

A note on language

This project is an interdisciplinary one, and as such has different terminologies. Within socially engaged art practice and gallery engagement work, the participants guiding and supporting projects are called advisors. Whereas within co-production work in research more often those engaged in the design processes, and 'research activities' are called co-researchers. Within *Uncertain Futures* we have alternated between these terms, the women who brought their expertise as community organisers, activists and community representatives have been equal partners with the Artist, Project Lead and Academic Researchers and together we have initiated, designed, and delivered the work utilising our skills and experiences as a shared resource pool. Throughout this guide we describe the advisory group when discussing it as a collective, and the members of this group as co-researchers.

Intersectionality in Practice

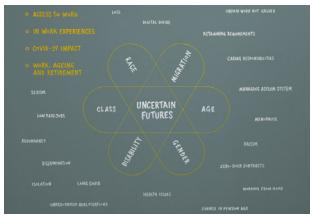
Central to *Uncertain Futures* was an intersectional framework that recognised how multiple identities - including age, gender, race, ethnicity, class, migration status, and disability - intersect to create unique experiences of work and inequality. Rather than treating intersectionality as a theoretical concept, we operationalised it as a practical tool throughout our research process.

Working collaboratively with the Advisory Group, we developed a comprehensive data matrix that mapped the intersections of identity categories against specific work experiences we wanted to explore: access to work, in-work experiences, exiting work and retirement, and the impact of Covid-19. This matrix ensured that our interview questions captured the complexity of how different aspects of identity combined to shape women's working lives. For example, we explored how being a Black African woman over 50 with caring responsibilities might create different barriers to employment than those faced by a white British woman of the same age without dependents.

This intersectional approach also shaped our thematic analysis of the 100 interview transcripts. Rather than analysing themes in isolation, we used our data matrix to examine how different combinations of identity and experience created distinct patterns of advantage and disadvantage. Importantly, this framework revealed the heterogeneous nature of experiences within our own Advisory Group, acknowledging that collective identity is not homogeneous but contains multiple differences based on social, economic, and power positions. These differences required ongoing navigation and created rich opportunities for learning and solidarity across difference.

The intersectional framework ensured that our research moved beyond single-issue analysis to capture the complex realities of how inequality operates in women's working lives, while also recognising the diversity of experiences within communities often treated as homogenous.

Timeline for the project



2019-2022
Design and Development (Research Matrix)

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2021
First Exhibition, Art as Research

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2022
Second Exhibition: Research as Art

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2023
Report and Documentary

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2024
Final Exhibition: *Stories of Women Work and Uncertain Futures*

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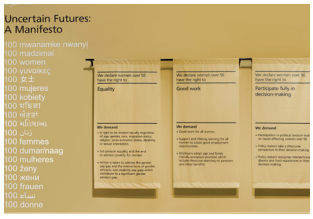

2024
Manifesto and Film

Covid

+

Community

+

Academic

+

Policy

Common Themes Across All Participatory Research Impacts

Before exploring the six key impacts of participatory research, it's important to understand the common themes that run through all successful participatory work. Our experience with *Uncertain Futures* revealed that regardless of the specific impact being pursued, whether peer development, capacity building, or policy influence, certain foundational elements consistently emerged as critical to success. The following themes represent the shared infrastructure that enabled all our work:

+ **Resource Management and Sustainability**
  Managing human and financial resources within participatory research presents unique challenges across all impact areas. Individuals have different disciplinary timeframes (art, community activism, research) and are managing some complementary, but often competing, commitments. Within participatory research, it can be difficult to manage these resources because of challenging time limitations, competing priorities and lack of adequate funding streams. This can restrict participation by some members of the team reducing their ability to build their own and their organisational capacity effectively.

  To address this we found that maintaining transparency, dialogue and flexibility is key. Clear communications and management of expectations ensures that all team members are aware of these constraints and can work around them in a flexible and fair manner. Specific resource for participation must be designed and planned into any proposals at the onset as a key feature for valuing a successful participatory and inclusive approach. But also, there must be flexibility throughout to enable an ongoing understanding and approach to moveable deadlines, where possible.

  Some creativity is required to overcome these challenges. This can involve more creative allocation of financial resources and flexibility in the development of outputs (to ensure team members are prioritised). It might also mean, for example, that the use of multiple smaller non-traditional funding sources are preferred over larger grants as this can allow for more organic growth of the project. These discussions should take place with the full team at the planning stage so that involvement is open and transparent.

  "Another key challenge is funding. We haven't had one single funding grant for Uncertain Futures and have fundraised throughout. This can be fruitful as we've been able to grow organically, and we've been able to really think about what we want and then apply for funding from non-arts-sector funding as well as arts funding." Ruth Edson, Project Lead

Maintaining momentum during and after a project is crucial for preserving the impacts achieved. This is challenging when funding ends and without clear continuation strategies. This can be addressed by developing strategic plans for project closure, maintaining open discussions about endings, and establishing regular communication channels with team members. This ensures impact is sustained through new organisational practices, ongoing development, and future resource mobilisation.

+ **Building and Maintaining Trust**
Building and maintaining trust and mutual respect is particularly important to note across all impacts of participatory research. This often happens in informal spaces and requires relationships of trust and mutual respect to be developed. This can take time particularly when bringing together diverse groups of people. It requires recognition that it is not a straightforward linear process, trust needs to be maintained throughout the process.

To develop strong relationships and trust there must be a commitment to ongoing care and attention to all members of the team. This requires openness to critique in non-defensive ways and leaders who demonstrate a true commitment to solidarity. This is particularly important when there are such diverse experiences and not everyone will have the same confidence in being part of a group. There is also always going to be challenges for individuals, it is inevitable, that there were moments of defensiveness, or occasional feelings of not being valued. However, within *Uncertain Futures*, we were fortunate to have a project lead who dedicated huge resource to supporting each member of the advisory group. Alongside which we all offered various support at different times dependent on the activity. And there were huge amounts of peer support between advisory group members too. There need to be methods in place to ensure this is ongoing and flexible.

Attention to relational work, and ongoing support is key to this, and being able to develop compassionate and transparent discourse. This type of research work and community engagement requires an attunement to the complexity of relationship dynamics, and the ability to bring a nuanced approach to any differences, or disagreements.

"Uncertain Futures has been a learning process for me. I was very uncertain when I joined the board, it took me a long time to feel comfortable. I did not feel that I was contributing anything to the project. I worried that I did not have enough knowledge about the discussions taking place, and that my lack of the same experiences was stopping me from being involved. I discussed my

fears with Ruth (the project lead) who was very kind to me, and put me at my ease by reassuring me." Sally Casey, Co-researcher

Often unexpected circumstances arise which can mean that co-researchers or participants may need to take a break from the project. To ensure inclusion, it is important to maintain an open-door policy which will allow individuals to option to return to the project when they are ready. During the course of *Uncertain Futures* we all encountered moments in our lives which meant that we may not be able to participate fully due to external exceptional circumstances, such as ill-health, bereavement, and personal care responsibilities. We operated an open-door policy in these circumstances which allowed individuals to return when they felt ready to participate again. This meant that we retained talent, skills and experience while also giving individuals the space and flexibility they needed.

+ **Power Dynamics and Inclusive Practice**

One of the key obstacles which can hamper successful participatory research is the potential for power imbalances within the relationships developed as part of the project. Power imbalances can arise from traditional research hierarchies which can lead to the voices of those 'in the know' being prioritised over other voices. This can lead to feelings of lack of value especially if lived experiences and cultural insights are overlooked.

Overcoming this requires the development of clear and transparent inclusive structures from the outset and ensuring that the voices of the participants and other co-researchers are central throughout the project. However, it is also still possible at times that not everyone will feel equal or valued, and it is possible that there will be disagreements about priorities. Within *Uncertain Futures* these were ongoing challenges, and it is important to recognise that difficulties cannot always be resolved but that doesn't mean a project will falter or fail, if the intention for good or best practice is there, and genuine effort is made.

To ensure this is avoided it is important to encourage equal participation by all partners and to recognise the legitimacy of different forms of knowledge. Where practice is inclusive and values all members, there is a much greater opportunity for sustainable development. Key aspects of this include addressing power dynamics openly, a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice, utilising intersectional frameworks and embracing an 'ethic of solidarity'. This has been a crucial aspect of the work of *Uncertain Futures,* where we have ensured that we have prioritised listening to the diverse voices of the co-researchers.

This also is relevant with respect to ownership of data and outputs produced throughout the project. Clear co-ownership guidelines

should be implemented at the earliest stages of the project so that all participants and co-researchers feel valued, respected and have an equal share in the project. However, within *Uncertain Futures* this has been difficult, because discussions in the beginning around ownership were quite abstract, and it has been something that we have needed to revisit at different points within the project and is still ongoing.

"I have learned to use openness in the participatory decision making that results in the ownership of the work by all." Dr. Tendayi Madzunzu, Co-Researcher

+ **Communication and Accessibility**

Language and accessibility barriers can be a stumbling block for many participatory research projects, particularly those which engage with diverse community groups. However, simple and effective adjustments should be factored into projects so that the research is accessible to everyone. This may include the use of translators, multilingual texts, occupying spaces which attract diverse audiences, engaging through developed relationships with marginalised populations and encouraging individuals to use spaces and places which may not traditionally be viewed as inclusive to break these barriers.

One of the biggest challenges can be as a result of the diverse backgrounds of individuals where language, culture, or disability might inhibit involvement in a project. To overcome this, it is crucial that the project team are alert to accessibility concerns, have developed multi-lingual approaches and have accessible options for participation which can ensure that all team members benefit fully from the experience. This can arise in the form of inclusive environments, flexibility and hybrid options for participation and providing language supports.

"I've learned the importance of creating inclusive and supportive environments for knowledge exchange. This approach not only enriches the research but also empowers participants and fosters a sense of community. I plan to incorporate these principles into my future work." Marie Greenhalgh, Co-Researcher.

There are a variety of communication styles and approaches that can and should utilise those which meet the needs of their audiences. Naturally there will be differences in language and terminology used and this can make exchanging knowledge more challenging. This is particularly true of academic jargon which can make the exchange inaccessible. It is important to listen to co-researchers, and to adjust language as appropriate. Additionally, there may be terminology which certain groups

find offensive, inappropriate or destructive, and it is vital to be aware and engaged in such concerns.

"Some of the academic language was sometimes challenging but it was all learning." Patsy Williams, Co-Researcher

+ **Time and Expectations Management**
Participatory research and socially engaged art practice is by its nature best suited to medium and long-term timetables rather than short term projects to ensure the proper application of guiding principles. Often within both, participatory research and socially engaged art practice, there is a natural lack of clarity on some issues as flexible evolution is key to success in many cases. However, where this flexible approach is embraced, such expectations can be successfully managed through clear communication and co-developing outputs.

One of the challenges of co-production is managing the expectations of the partners so that there is a clear understanding of the purpose of the project and the role that each partner can and will play. Co-researchers can have differing expectations, and this may include different methods, timelines and potential outcomes. Teams need to flexible and team-oriented to accept and embrace the new ideas and interventions which may not have been originally conceived and to adapt to new ways and methods of communication.

There will always be team members with different levels of confidence, competence and comfort at various stages or aspects of participatory research. To build and maintain this confidence requires key support structures, peer learning and sharing, mentorship and continued reassurance and encouragement. The development of safe spaces for learning and recognising and valuing diverse contributions is an essential requirement. And a recognition that people can thrive in different spaces, and through different roles. Ensuring the valuing of all skills and inputs is key and encouraging this valuing of each other across the project team.

These common themes provide the foundation for the specific impacts detailed in the following sections. While each impact area has its unique characteristics and requirements, they all depend on the successful implementation of these underlying principles.

+ Section 2

1 Peer Working: Support, Engagement and Development

A key impact of *Uncertain Futures* was the development of peers. One of the earliest activities in any participatory research project is the development of relationships with and between the co-researchers. In *Uncertain Futures*, we established an Advisory Group of 15 women co-researchers between March and September 2020. This group, who advised on all aspects of the project, represent a diverse group of women who were active in their communities, from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, women whose ages ranged from 50-80, women who were newly migrated to the city and others who had lived in Manchester all of their lives.

Weekly meetings were held virtually to develop project goals and to co-design the first gallery installation - a room that served as an interview site to confidentially collect the work experiences of women over 50 representing a cross section of Manchester residents. Within the group, intersectionality revealed both shared experiences and significant differences in economic position, migration status, and community connections. These differences required ongoing navigation and created rich learning opportunities. Together with the rest of the project team, university researchers, project lead and artists, the co-researchers engaged in the design of a 'data matrix' of key intersectional work experiences and, through their communities, recruited 100 women from varied cultures with different experiences to take part in interviews held in the gallery. The establishment of this Advisory Group was a dynamic and intentional process and the work which they have achieved together is immense.

One of the biggest achievements has been the peer development within the team and the sharing of this development throughout their communities, organisations and peer community.

+ Uncertain Futures Advisory Group

Photo: Ahmani Vidal-Simon. Design: Office of Craig.

Embedding Peer Development

Peer development is a dynamic process within participatory research where co-researchers grow both individually and collectively through shared learning and reciprocal knowledge exchange. Everyone brings their own unique blend of knowledge and skills, reflecting different social, economic, and cultural positions within and across communities. Unlike traditional collaboration or peer support, it emphasises the transformative journey of all involved, recognising that expertise and experience comes in many forms and growth occurs through both formal and informal interactions.

To ensure that peer development can happen within the participatory research space, it is critical that the following elements are in place within the project:

+ **Who you choose to partner with matters**
Strategic selection of co-researchers is vital. In *Uncertain Futures*, we intentionally created an Advisory Group by selecting people who were community leaders with diverse experiences and backgrounds. The team's composition should reflect the communities the research aims to serve. We were also intentional in ensuring that the women who were invited to be part of the advisory group would have strong links to their communities. Many, but not all were already key voices within their communities and linked to wider networks within Manchester and beyond; others were representative of less heard voices, such as those newly migrated to the city, without established links.

  "The recruitment process of the Advisory Group, demonstrated awareness of the diversity of Manchester Black African ethnic group, and a genuine effort to include marginalised voices that are constantly left out. By asking who is missing at the table and reaching out to community organisations enabled unheard voices to be heard. The Advisory Group worked and spoke with openness, honesty, and everyone brought their beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about issues - we were the discussions. It strengthened my view to challenge misconceptions and assumptions about people." Dr. Tendayi Madzunzu, Co-Researcher

+ **Safe spaces for open communication need to be created**
This ensures that there are transparent and accessible platforms for discussion where all voices can be heard and valued. Meeting strategies should ensure that quieter or less confident members have opportunities to speak, while limiting the contributions of more vocal members. This can take skilled facilitation, and time too, as people develop their voices at different paces. In addition some members will contribute in different ways and in preferred mediums.

+ **A system of ongoing support is required**
To ensure that beyond the confines of group meetings there is continuous growth and engagement between the team members. As well as a recognition that over the duration of a project things can happen in people's lives, and this can impact on the ability to contribute.

+ **A considered and transparent approach to respectful communications**
This will ensure that all viewpoints and forms of expression are adequately recognised and respected throughout the process. There is the need to keep reflecting on these kinds of processes throughout a project.

"What I have learned in this project has left an indelible mark on my way of working in the future. Sharing ideas in activities, highlighting stories of marginalised women, sharing the unfairness of paid and unpaid carers." Sally Casey, Co-researcher

Examples of Peer Development

+ **Peer Development through research design and implementation**
Co-researchers were encouraged to develop all aspects of the project from design to delivery of outputs, though it was recognised people would have different time commitments and interests. In *Uncertain Futures*, co-researchers helped to develop the intersectional matrix underpinning the research design - the development of which took several weeks and was returned to in whole group discussions, and then worked on by the academic researchers between meetings and represented the following week; the ethics application and here a small sub-group supported the academic researchers in thinking through key ethical concerns, and then whole group discussions were held to think through how we would ensure a care-full ethics process; participation in the selection of research subjects - each advisory group member was tasked with recruiting 10 participants each from their networks and communities; a sub-group were trained in thematic analysis. Four co-researchers, along with the Project Lead and both academic researchers met for two half days training in thematic analysis. Each member of the sub-group were given anonymised transcripts to code, and this was carried out both individually and sometimes in small meetings at the gallery. Together we analysed the 100 transcripts to create four intersecting themes that became the chapters within the research report.

+ **Peer Development through community leadership**
Co-researchers were actively encouraged to engage with their communities and to share their existing leadership skills with others. Within *Uncertain Futures* sub-groups worked on aspects of the project: these included a programme of civic events in partnership with Manchester City Council Work and Skills team, focussing on topics such as pensions, leadership skills and menopause; as well as a sub-group organising the 100 women celebratory dinner.

"The project as a whole and way we work has influenced me as individual... I am very happy that I am member of the Uncertain Future project and enjoyed the roles I played. I believe people need to have hands together for peace in the world." Jila Mozoun, Co-researcher

+ **Peer Development through regular support structures**
Weekly meetings took place on zoom at the same time each week, for the first two years of the project. These regular meetings were scheduled for the same time and day each week. The agenda was generally set according to current tasks to keep driving the project forward, and due to the timeframe for the exhibition openings at the Gallery. Sometimes we would spend a few weeks talking about small details before a consensus was reached. After the first two phases of the project were completed, meetings moved to a monthly schedule. We now have a plan in place for maintaining contact as the main project activities are completed such as twice-yearly meetings, and we are also discussing the development of a newsletter to maintain regular contact. It is important for to consider endings, and how to support people once a project ends.

+ **Peer Development through inclusive practice**
Where practice is inclusive and values all members, there is a much greater opportunity for sustainable peer development. Key aspects include addressing power dynamics openly, a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice, utilising intersectional frameworks and embracing an 'ethic of solidarity'. This was a crucial aspect of the work where we prioritised listening to diverse voices of the co-researchers, and these values were ongoing and often needed revisiting and renegotiating.

2 Building Capacity

In March 2022, the 100 women who were participants in the research interviews were invited to a celebratory dinner at the Manchester Art Gallery. The entire event was planned as a discursive 'performance', in which the interviewed women were invited to share their experiences of the interview process, and to hear feedback from the research. In September 2022, the second of three installations opened at the Manchester Art Gallery, aiming to provide an in-depth review of the structure and process of the project. Inside the 'interview' room, research methodologies were revealed alongside the anonymised transcripts from 100 interviews. A film of the celebratory dinner was displayed alongside a text and voice installation based on the co-researcher's own personal experiences of work as older women. Alongside this *Chai and Chat* sessions brought community members into the Gallery space, creating informal intergenerational dialogue about work experiences.

+ Interview booth and text installation from the Uncertain Futures exhibition. Photo: Michael Pollard. Design: Office of Craig.

Embedding Building Capacity

Building capacity through participatory research involves strengthening the abilities, resources, and networks of individuals, organisations, and communities to create sustainable change. Unlike traditional training approaches, participatory capacity building is a reciprocal process where knowledge and skills flow in multiple directions, enhancing the capabilities of all involved - from researchers to community leaders, and community members to institutions.

To foster effective capacity building in participatory research, certain essential conditions should be encouraged:

+ It is crucial to recognise and value the existing expertise within the team. Community members bring valuable insights from their lived experiences across different social, economic, and cultural positions, as well as leadership skills and local knowledge that should be utilised throughout the research process.

  "Uncertain Futures has been hugely impactful. As a gallery learning specialist, I am passionate about placing art at the heart of solutions that generate societal change. The combination of a highly experienced socially engaged artist with esteemed academic researchers and passionate community leaders in a civic gallery space are the key ingredients that has made Uncertain Futures a hugely significant and impactful artwork." Ruth Edson, Project Lead

+ To ensure sustainable development and to build capacity for future projects, there should be a clear focus on creating lasting skills, resources and capabilities that remain within communities after the project concludes and these considerations need to be ongoing and revisited.

+ There should be an emphasis not just on individual growth but also on organisational growth. One of the key features of participatory research is that it has the capacity to impact and change how organisations build and develop in line with the research. Ensuring that team members have the capacity to influence institutional capabilities will ensure long-term impact.

  "Uncertain Futures gave me an opportunity to meet women with different backgrounds and work in different organisations, it not only widened my network outside the Chinese community, the regular virtual zoom meeting, especially during Covid period, we support each other, openly sharing our lived experience, personal circumstances in which we reflected inequality, discrimination, precarity and social isolation that we encountered." Louise Wong, Co-Researcher

+ Capacity building will flounder unless there is a strong connection between different stakeholders which can enable ongoing development and support beyond the initial project scope. Therefore, building strong networks is an essential element in securing capacity and the potential for new or spin off projects to emerge.

"I'm working on a personal project, very much influenced by my involvement with Uncertain Futures and the value of lived experiences. I have written an original play and I will be using extracts from the script to form a workshop to understand and explore adverse childhood experiences and its impact in later life on older women. Drawing on the collaborative approaches of Uncertain Futures, I've gained new confidence in my creativity and developed impactful workshops." Marie Greenhalgh, Co-Researcher

Examples of Building Capacity

+ **Building Capacity within individual team members**
Individual capacity building occurred through active engagement and co-working throughout the project. In *Uncertain Futures* members built upon existing skills through specific activities: such as research skills, development in design and analysis; shared decision-making opportunities; aesthetic productions; event organisation; project management experience through offshoot projects; presentation opportunities at events and digital skills development through project films and online seminars.

  "I think the commitment of the regular group meetings enabled the Co-Research Group members establishing a rapport relationship, also through the formation of the group enabling community cohesion and solidarity. It was very important for shaping the research questions, co-designing the project and co-creating activities to achieve the outcomes and beyond." Louise Wong, Co-Researcher

+ **Building institutional capacity**
During *Uncertain Futures* we actively encouraged institutional dissemination to enhance the impact of the project. This had the effect of increasing the ripple effect of the project. Our 'Connectivity Map' demonstrates the importance of developing and encouraging these connections. Both the universities and the gallery have been influenced by the project. Within the gallery the project has been a new way of working, of bringing community outreach into the gallery, whereas within the Universities *Uncertain Futures* has had a huge impact on the development of a project reflecting on and exploring ideas around what makes authentic participatory research. Both universities funded the development of this toolkit, the manifesto and the connectivity map in order to ensure the capacity developed could be disseminated widely.

  "I am motivated by the culmination of community leaders, artists, researchers and the gallery coming together to create art and research collectively. Despite collective decision-making being challenging and often slow, it is also a fundamental strength and a key asset to have four disciplines working together to create such rich dialogue and interdisciplinary practice." Ruth Edson, Project Lead

+ **Building collective capacity:** The project team was intentionally created with conscious effort to consider who was sitting at the table. For example, the work focused on understanding experiences of work for older women from the perspective

of women from minoritised backgrounds. We brought co-researchers who were community leaders from a range of different communities who could represent diverse communities across the region.

"It has been a springboard for projects. The experience and insights gained through UF have served as a motive for venturing into other projects. By leveraging the networks, skills, and thematic understanding developed during UF, participants have been able to contribute effectively to new initiatives, expanding the reach and influence of UF's ethos...UF has acted as a transformative and empowering experience, creating ripple effects that extend beyond its immediate scope." Nadia Siddiqui, Co-Researcher

3 Creating Dialogue

In November 2023, the project held an event at Manchester Art Gallery to share the research findings with policy makers, researchers, and other organisations. The event was supported by Metropolis, a policy think tank embedded within Manchester Metropolitan University and was featured as an Economic and Social Research Council *Festival of Social Science* Event. To generate interest in the work, and to further the aim to create dialogue, a panel of speakers were invited to share their responses to the research findings and connect it to their own work. Researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University, Cardiff University, The University of Kent were invited, and also policy makers from The Work Foundation and from Greater Manchester Combined Authority which led to some fantastic conversations and potential future collaborations.

+ The 100-Women Celebratory Dinner. at Manchester Art Gallery. Photo: Andrew Brooks.

Embedding Creating Dialogue

Creating dialogue in participatory research involves fostering open communication and meaningful exchange between organisations, individuals, communities, and networks. This collaborative approach transcends traditional one-way communication by establishing inclusive spaces where diverse voices contribute equally to collective understanding and action.

To ensure effective dialogue in participatory research, it is important to operationalise certain key characteristics within group dynamics:

+ It is vital to encourage connections between groups and individuals who might not have connected with one another. This can be achieved by creating spaces and conversations which build mutual understanding, foster deeper connections and allow for shared learning. This also allows assumptions to be challenged which promotes greater understanding and questions viewpoints in a collaborative way. This can be achieved in a variety of ways from minimising hierarchies in weekly meetings and project events, using creative methods, collaborative decision-making, co-research involvement at all stages of the project and ensuring ongoing support and care.

  "Personally, the collaborative approach of this project has been the most outstanding experience for me. Meeting like-minded individuals from diverse backgrounds and bringing the issues faced by older women to the fore has been extremely rewarding." Elayne Redford, MCC Work and Skills Specialist, Co-Researcher

+ It is also important to create a clear network through which information can flow securely and fairly between all those involved in the research. Creating these knowledge pathways will ensure that there are clear channels of communication and allows information and insights to flow between communities, organisations, and institutions. Knowledge pathways can take various forms, but we have been fortunate within the project to have a project lead, and that has helped to ensure our communication was regular, and consistent.

+ A key element of participatory research is developing new connections and strengthening existing ones. This exercise in development and transformation of relationships from a one-off encounter to lasting mutually respectful relationships allows for the creation of an enduring network beyond the research project. This is something that we have all been able to do, as we have all embraced sharing the work within our organisations and networks.

  "I have been able to use the project findings to raise awareness of the issues facing women over 50 in relation to finding suitable employment and getting health and wellbeing support while in work." Elayne Redford, MCC Work and Skills Specialist, Co-Researcher

Examples of creating dialogue

+ **Creating dialogue through creative practices**
The dedicated gallery space at Manchester Art Gallery (2021-2025) hosted three successive exhibitions: (a) Live interviews exhibition; (b) Research process showcase; (c) *Stories of Women, Work and Uncertain Futures.* The space enabled public dialogue about project topics, collection of feedback at different project stages and facilitated conversations with the general public, students, policy makers, researchers and community groups.

  "Uncertain Futures has been a transformative project, offering a platform to foster dialogue within my networks and broader community. By addressing critical issues such as work, age, and equity through artistic and research-based approaches, it encouraged conversations that might not have occurred otherwise. As a member of the Advisory Group, I leveraged this space to connect with diverse stakeholders, including policymakers, artists, and community leaders, to challenge preconceived notions and amplify marginalised voices, particularly older women from underrepresented communities." Prof. Erinma Bell, Co-Researcher

+ **Creating dialogue through digital engagement**
Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the international location of artist Suzanne Lacy in California, the project embraced digital working. This included the weekly meetings; online events through the ESRC Festival of Social Science; virtual conference presentations; and development of a project website serving as a virtual space for connections.

+ **Creating dialogue through community led initiatives**
Community initiatives created dialogue through workshops, sharing events, participation at academic and policy events and co-hosted events. Activities included: sharing project progress within co-researchers' own networks; panel participation at conferences and seminars such as with the Centre for Ageing Better; community-hosted events within co-researchers' organisations; and the development of multilingual art provocations displayed outside Manchester Art Gallery in Urdu, Arabic, Mandarin, and Polish.

  "This project has equipped me with tools to facilitate more inclusive discussions and challenge systemic biases, further enriching my efforts to create meaningful impact within my networks and beyond." Prof. Erinma Bell, Co-Researcher

4 Amplifying Voices

After the policy event in November 2023, we maintained momentum by continuing to host private meetings with relevant city council officials, MPs, and policy makers and influencers to share the research findings and recommendations. The Gallery space has been used often to host ad hoc community groups, funders, cultural organisations, academics and students to stimulate discussion and encourage creative practice as a means of influencing policy.

+ Publication of the findings research report. Photo: Marge Bradshaw.

What we have learned about amplifying voice from this project

One of the main benefits of participatory research is that the perspectives, experiences and stories of marginalised individuals and communities are made visible, elevated and highlighted. This occurs through active involvement of the individuals and communities in the research process, ensuring that the research and the outcomes reflect their perspectives and experiences.

To ensure the most effective outcomes, there are certain key elements which should be incorporated into the research process:

+ Participants should be **involved at all stages of the research process**, influencing research questions, methods, analysis, findings and outputs and dissemination. This ensures that the entire research process is elevated by the voices of those most integral to the research.

+ Participants should be as **representative** as possible of the communities to be represented, providing a platform for voices that might otherwise be unheard. It is important to seek out those voices and to invite them to take part in the research as equal partners.

  "The fact that we represent networks and communities in a structured way and have the capacity and reach into communities has helped us to promote Uncertain Futures, share it with others, signpost/accompany community and engage people in the issues."
  Atiha Chaudry, Co-researcher

+ The research methods should be designed in such a way that **safe spaces** are available for the co-researchers to articulate their own concerns, solutions and creative inputs. This is an integral part of the research design and ensures that all co-researchers feel empowered to speak and have their voices heard. This also ensures that traditional hierarchical power dynamics are replaced by collaborative practices and shifts the nature of the relationship from an extractive one to a genuinely co-operative one. Where possible these meetings should be regular and planned to respect the time commitment of all those involved.

+ Data and other outputs arising from the project should be **co-owned and shared** and this should be written into the project's initial documentation and should be revisited through the duration of the project. This ensures that there is a sense of ownership and empowerment. However, as we have shared in an earlier part of this guide, there are complexities to ownership, and the work may end up being taken forward in different directions by members of the team.

  "Uncertain Futures has enabled me to amplify women's voices adding to the broader understanding of existing inequalities faced by over 50s women in Greater Manchester through my participation across three network sessions: The first one when I co-presented about the Uncertain Futures project at the 2023 British Society of Gerontology conference whose theme was 'Inclusive Ageing Society for All' hosted by the University of East Anglia. The second high profile event where I amplified the voices

of is when Uncertain Futures enabled me to presented at the Good Work conference in Manchester on 10 April 2024, sharing my personal and the experiences of African women who arrived in England in 2000s perpetual work inequalities that continue to blight the lives of newly arrived over 50s African women despite having qualifications. In November 2024, through the Uncertain Futures project, I was able to participate at the Museums Association, where I co-presented with Ruth Edson, Dr Sarah Campbell, and Natasha Howes. At that conference, I was able to amplify my voice as a Zimbabwean & Black African woman." Dr. Tendayi Madzunzu, Co-Researcher

+ **Time** is a key component (and challenge) of amplifying voice. It is integral that time is taken to develop relationships, build trust and the develop safe places for learning and sharing.

  "The fact that its been a long term co-production has meant that there has been lots of time for engagement, development, networking, learning and confidence building." Atiha Chaudry, Co-researcher

+ It is important to have a **dedicated team member** who is the central connector around which all of the voices can coalesce. This ensures that no voices go unheard, that all voices are respectful and that where differences arise these can be negotiated.

  "The dedicated role at Manchester Art Gallery, provided by Ruth has enabled all this to take place - without this dedication and passion we would not have been able to achieve as much. The regular communications, meetings, engagement and involvement has kept Uncertain Futures sustained at a high impactful level." Atiha Chaudry, Co-researcher

  It is also important to respect the time commitment of all partners. This also should be reflected in compensating those involved for their time. It should be an integral part of any participatory research design that there is some mechanism for compensating those who are integral partners. It is also vital to recognise, that even if co-researchers are being recompensed for their time, they are still essentially volunteers, and their time should be respected. It is possible that availability may fluctuate throughout the project, and there needs to be flexibility built into timelines.

Examples of amplifying voice

+ **Amplifying voice through co-creation**
  Participatory research, first and foremost, amplifies the voices of the co-researchers many of whom may never have had previous opportunities to share their experiences and practices with others. This has the added value of building capacity within the co-researchers and their organisations.

  "Uncertain Futures has valued our input in different ways and that has helped enormously with sustaining our engagement journey, keeping us motivated and inspiring us to amplify our voices...the personal and professional development we have gained, the

opportunities we have had (which we would not have otherwise had) e.g. research, presentations, drama, writing, being guides, facilitation and speaking in public as well as attending amazing conferences local, national and international." Atiha Chaudry, Co-researcher

+ **Amplifying voice through partnerships**
Projects normally will have a variety of partners which allows voices to be heard, connections to be developed and opportunities to be manifested. There is often a ripple effect which emerges from these partnerships with new, and often unconnected, opportunities arising. For example being asked to write a blog for the Centre for Ageing Better, or being invited to take part in events such as

"Working with Elaine Dewhurst [one of the academic researchers] I have now been successful to gain a fellowship at the University of Manchester and will be able to connect our networks and communities to a lot more to research." Atiha Chaudry, Co-researcher

+ **Amplifying Voice through public engagement:** One of the most effective ways of amplifying voices is to engage with the public. Using a variety of methods is optimal, allowing for different groups to be engaged in various ways. Events, exhibitions, and presentations allow for the exchange of knowledge but where such engagement includes an element of discussion and dialogue sharing, this ensures that new and underheard voices are amplified. Members of the Advisory Group have been key at developing opportunities to engage with the public, through activities such as Marie Greenhalgh's International Women's Day *Interruptions* in the gallery in March 2022, which utilised Marie's creative drama skills, or through activities like public tours during *Good Employment Week* 2024.

5 Knowledge Exchange

In March 2024, the third installation opened entitled *Stories of Women, Work and Uncertain Futures*. This was the concluding exhibition of *Uncertain Futures* at Manchester Art Gallery, but future exhibitions are planned, for example part of the exhibition has been exhibited in Berlin, Germany from February 2025-May 2025. A new three channel film uses extracts from the 100 interviews undertaken in 2021, narrated by Advisory Group members and other actors. As the film progresses, what first appears to be women recounting their own personal experiences is transformed into an understanding that these accounts are, in actuality, universal ones. The film was shown alongside a manifesto calling for change, a photograph of the 100 women interviewed and a documentary which outlines the research findings.

+ Still from Stories of Women, Work and Uncertain Futures. Photo: Michael Pollard

What have we learned about knowledge exchange from this project

Central to participatory research is the very effective way it captures and promotes knowledge sharing and exchange. It actively involves all stakeholders in the research process from design and development to the outputs. This ensures a dialogic flow of knowledge, rather than a more traditional hierarchical dissemination of information. To foster the most effective level of knowledge exchange, there are certain essential conditions which should be encouraged:

+ The knowledge to be exchanged should be born from **co-creation**. This ensures a rich combination of lived experiences, cultural insights and local expertise with academic knowledge. This involves building up, over time, a core commitment from the group as to what it is that is being done and for what reasons.

+ Exchanges of knowledge should be dialogic so that there is **mutual learning**. Academics can gain practical, cultural and lived insights from community members while research skills, methods, and thinking can be mutually shared. However, it is also important to remember different actors can also embody different roles within the project, and also can share in the lived experiences of the co-researchers. In *Uncertain Futures*, the team were all experienced in caregiving, and had also experienced inequalities in relation to work, such as the experience of fragmented working lives. Equally within our Advisory Group, co-researchers were highly skilled individuals within their own right, including one member who gained her doctorate during the project duration, others were multi-lingual, had established or led organisations, were playwrights amongst just a few of the many talents.

+ Where knowledge exchange activities take place, there should be a **democratisation of knowledge**. This means that different forms of expertise should be equally valued and respected.

  "Knowledge exchange and sharing skills with each other is important with genuine motivation of learning curiosity 'to go and find out' as not be 'delivered on the plate' to us. Importantly whilst acknowledging diverse spectrum of requirement: identity, language, faith, class, so forth, nevertheless it is essential to exchange knowledge, skills, tips for progressive equitable inclusive practice rather than exclusive 'divide and rule' way of working."
  Rohina Oram, Co-researcher

+ To ensure the most effective knowledge exchange, there naturally must be **excellent communication**. This means that those engaged in knowledge exchange should think about the most appropriate forums, environments, methods of communication and audience needs in planning their knowledge exchange activity. Creative methods are very useful in this context where there is a significant public engagement angle.

  "Uncertain Futures has been located in one of the gallery collection spaces, with a high volume of visitors rather than being in a temporary exhibition space. This has meant that the work has resonated with visitors from all walks of life. Working in a

collection space within the gallery has enabled us to have more freedom to evolve and alter the space within each phase of the project." Ruth Edson, Project Lead

Examples of Knowledge Exchange

+ **Knowledge Exchange through academic work**
Traditional academic outputs (publications/academic presentations) encourage dialogue within academic circles but can also ensure that research remains relevant to real world needs.

+ **Knowledge Exchange through art**
Engaging with creative methods has the effect of creating a two-way exchange of knowledge in informal, engaging settings. It can also bring to the fore issues that can be challenging to represent in more traditional forms, such as the emotional impact of inequality. This can make for powerful knowledge exchange tools such as the final three-channel art film that was the feature of the final exhibition, *Stories of Work, Women and Uncertain Futures.*

+ **Knowledge Exchange through stakeholder engagement**
Engaging with stakeholders is essential to bridge the gap between research and potential tangible impacts. Within *Uncertain Futures* we have tried to share the project with a wide range of stakeholders from community organisations to national and international thinktanks and campaign organisations. For example, *Uncertain Futures* was featured in the *UN Decade of Health Ageing Progress Report* in 2023.

+ **Knowledge Exchange through community engagement**
Where there is effective community engagement, this has the positive effect of making the community into active contributors rather than passive subjects. During *Uncertain Futures*, we held, for example, *Chai and Chat* events where the co-researchers would bring members of their communities to the Gallery to discuss the issues raised by the project and to exchange stories, experiences and knowledge with one another.

+ **Knowledge Exchange through storytelling**
Narrative or storytelling helps to translate lived experiences into research insights and assists participants in understanding different perspectives. In this way more practical shared solutions can be developed. It can help translate lived experiences into research insights and policy recommendations.

+ **Knowledge Exchange through reciprocal learning visits**
Encouraging community and other groups to meet and discuss specific research outcomes encourages peer-to-peer learning and broadens perspectives beyond the immediate research setting. This is something *Uncertain Futures* has aimed to do lots of such as, a 2024 trip to Berlin, where we were taken on a tour of a local neighbourhood where a theatre company were undertaking similar engagement work.

6 Informing Policy and Practice

Throughout the project we have disseminated the findings widely, including in academic journals, online platforms, at conferences, on policy panels and in the media. Our extensive research report *Uncertain Futures - 100 women* and a short documentary highlights the key themes and recommendations of our research. We continue to develop substantive outputs from the work, always in consultation with the full project group. We created a short documentary, *Uncertain Futures Research Findings.* We have reported on the research in conferences, on panels and in the media and this continues through the research team, and always in consultation with the full project group.

+ 100-Women Celebratory Dinner at Manchester Art Gallery. Photo: Andrew Brooks

What we have learned about informing policy and practice from this project

One of the key elements of participatory research is that it involves the active engagement of stakeholders from a very early stage in the research process. This is because the informing of policy and practice is not only an integral part of the research design but also a key research output. Stakeholders can include community members or organisations, practitioners, policy makers, local authorities, cultural organisations, and others.

To ensure the most effective outcomes, there are certain key elements which should be incorporated into the research process:

+ Informing policy and practice should be an **integral element of the research design** and the involvement of stakeholders at the design stage secures relationships, trust and mutual respect which is central to a successful project. It also ensures that stakeholders are more disposed to supporting and advocating for the resulting policies. We have kept stakeholders informed and involved at each stage of the project. However, we did not necessarily have a clear policy plan at the outset because of the way the project grew organically. Therefore, it is also possible to consider these aspects as a project evolves, but it should feature as part of ongoing planning.

+ Careful selection of stakeholders ensures that there are **diverse perspectives** feeding into the research from the design stage. This will ensure that any policies and practices developed are grounded in real-world experiences and reflect the voices of those, often excluded, from decision-making processes. It also means that the process will foster culturally appropriate and locally appropriate interventions. This will make the policies chosen more inclusive and equitable.

  "One of the most important aspects of the project is its emphasis on storytelling and personal narratives. This approach to community participation not only humanises the issues but also offers a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers faced by women over 50 from diverse backgrounds. The project's collaborative nature and focus on real-life experiences have been instrumental in driving meaningful change." Circle Steele, Co-researcher

+ Ensure **adequate time and resources** are available to allow stakeholders to engage with the research, discuss policies and provide insights into what is feasible and effective. This will allow for a form of iterative feedback which allows policy to be refined on a continuous basis.

+ Recognise that the data collected will facilitate evidence-based policymaking in a manner which is different to more traditional research methods. Participatory research captures more nuanced and rich data which is particularly useful for capturing **case studies** which can serve to illustrate the impacts various policy interventions may have before full implementation.

Approaches to reach policy and practice

Informing policy and practice can take many forms. Within participatory research, the sharing of stories is a very powerful method of engaging policy makers with the key issues and highlighting the key structural problems within the research area. It can also lead to practical change within organisations who engage with such sharing activities.

+ **Sharing with policy makers**
Sharing stories is emotive and a very powerful way to highlight key research findings. Case studies are a powerful tool in making complex issues more relatable, memorable, and emotionally compelling. A strong narrative can serve as a call to action, motivating policymakers to champion a cause, push for legislative change, or allocate resources. This kind of dissemination can also encourage policy makers to value different forms of knowledge.

  "What was interesting is that the people I met were really keen to hear individual stories, to address certain nuances and to reflect on how this was perhaps caused or exacerbated by certain legislative and policy choices. They were really eager for us to provide them with clear case studies which they could use to push for particular policy adjustments." Prof. Elaine Dewhurst, reflecting on a meeting with a Government Department to discuss issues regarding pensions and older women which had emerged from the research findings.

+ **Sharing with community organisations**
Sharing with community organisations can allow for the development of new practices within these organisations and within the host organisation. Sharing practice has the effect of evoking reflection on working practices as well as on the particular policy issues which result from the research.

  "Which is why we need community development workers like us who are more on the ground and face to face with people and have the time to, you know, to understand what's actually, you know, going on and stuff like that." Patsy Williams, Co-researcher

+ **Sharing with the public**
Sharing personal stories which reflect the everyday lives of ordinary people allows the researchers and policy makers to communicate with the public in a compelling way, strengthening trust and support. It garners strength and support and, ultimately, action.

  "The community reflected on the story of a Chinese woman who trusted us and shared her experience of being at risk of homelessness. She recounted sleeping on the floor above a takeaway shop with her newborn son, a deeply emotional memory from many years ago. As a migrant to a new country, she faced numerous challenges, including the absence of an extended family, limited English proficiency, and little access to information. This story resonated with me and underscored the importance of shaping our services to better support older women, particularly Polish older women and others aged 50+ and 65+, through trusted

community engagement. While this includes Chinese women, it is equally important to broaden our focus to include women from other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For example, in the coming years, we aim to enhance our services for Polish older women and other diverse communities through initiatives at the Welcome Centre. By addressing their needs through upcoming projects, I have been able to highlight the specific challenges these women face, contributing to more informed and empathetic policy-making." Circle Steele, Co-researcher, on the experience of sharing the *Uncertain Futures* documentary with community organisations, reflecting on how this sharing process helped shape practices within Circle's own organisation.

"Hearing stories of the pension system was of note, as whilst I am 18 now, the looming fear of ageing and being unable to provide for myself looms. The lack of change is frightening. I want to change this, or, at the very least, witness this change within my lifetime. However, I doubt this will happen, although I will try and remain optimistic." Visitor Feedback on *Stories of Women, Work and Uncertain Futures,* Manchester Art Gallery 2024.

Specific examples of policy and practice impact

We have engaged directly with policymakers at multiple levels to share our findings and advocate for change. This has included presentations to the Department of Work and Pensions and the Government Office for Science, where we highlighted systemic issues affecting older women's economic security. We participated in a roundtable discussion with Alison McGovern, Minister for Social Security, addressing critical concerns about the invisibility of women's unpaid work and the financial precarity faced by women without occupational pensions. At regional and local levels, we have met with policymakers across Manchester and Greater Manchester to discuss our manifesto and collaborate on practical strategies to combat inequality for older women in our communities.

Academic dissemination remains a key priority, with our research reaching both specialist and general audiences. We have successfully published in *The Gerontologist* journal and *The Conversation* platform, demonstrating the relevance of our findings across academic and public spheres. Our ongoing publication strategy includes developing articles for journals focused on participatory research methodologies, intersectionality, and social policy, ensuring our work continues to influence academic discourse and practice in these critical areas.

We have disseminated back to the communities who took part in the research, hosting a series of events based on sharing the documentary film with communities, this included conversations with those who had been participant in the research and others who also took the opportunity to share their stories, such was the resonance of the documentary.

We have also shared our work in international settings, the project has been platformed at a conference at the National Centre for Art and Research in Tokyo, Japan, as well as PAARnet (A COST Action project that facilitates knowledge exchange across academica, policy and practice) in Frankfurt, and in Berlin Germany.

Our Top Tips

1 Representation Matters

+ Intentionally create a diverse team that reflects the communities your research aims to serve
+ Be rigorous in the selection of co-researchers, seeking those with community connections
+ Value different types of expertise equally—lived experience is as valuable as academic knowledge

2 Building Trust is Essential

+ Allow adequate time for relationship-building before diving into the research
+ Create safe spaces for open communication where all voices are heard
+ Address power dynamics openly and transparently
+ Be open to critique in non-defensive ways

3 Resource Appropriately

+ Compensate community participation fairly
+ Plan for accessibility needs from the beginning
+ Build flexibility into project timelines and budgets
+ Consider multiple smaller funding sources rather than one large grant
+ Include participation resources in project proposals from the start

4 Share Ownership

+ Involve co-researchers at all stages of the research process
+ Establish clear co-ownership guidelines from the outset
+ Revisit agreements about ownership throughout the project
+ Ensure outputs are accessible to all stakeholders
+ Value all forms of contribution

5 Support Personal Development

+ Recognise existing skills and expertise within the team
+ Create opportunities for skills development in design, analysis, presentation, etc.
+ Provide support for less confident members
+ Celebrate achievements and growth
+ Allow space for social connections

6. Plan for Sustainability

+ Develop strategies for maintaining momentum after formal project ends
+ Build capacity within organisations and communities for lasting impact
+ Create clear mechanisms for knowledge sharing
+ Document the process as well as the outcomes
+ Use creative methods to share findings widely

7 Embrace Flexibility

+ Accept that participatory research rarely follows a linear path
+ Be open to changing direction based on co-researcher input
+ Allow for people to step back temporarily when needed
+ Maintain an open-door policy for participation
+ Prepare for the unexpected

8 Foster Dialogue

+ Use multiple channels for communication (in-person, digital, creative)
+ Create bridges between groups who might not normally connect
+ Make research accessible through multilingual approaches
+ Consider trauma-informed approaches to engagement
+ Use arts and creative practices to engage diverse audiences

9 Prioritise Care

+ Provide emotional support for researchers dealing with challenging material
+ Pay attention to the social aspects of working together
+ Recognise when people need breaks
+ Create celebrations to mark milestones
+ Acknowledge the personal impact of the work

10 Connect to Action

+ Create clear pathways from research to practice and policy
+ Develop compelling ways to present qualitative data
+ Use storytelling and case studies to illustrate impact
+ Involve stakeholders early in the research process
+ Test interventions before recommending them widely

+ Section 3

+ Glossary
+ Key Resources for Further Learning

Glossary

Advisory Group: In the context of the *Uncertain Futures* project, a group of 15 women co-researchers between the ages of 50-80 from diverse backgrounds who guided all aspects of the project from design to implementation. In socially engaged art practice and gallery engagement work, these participants are often referred to as advisors.

Co-creation: A collaborative approach where all stakeholders (including community members, researchers, artists, and organisations) contribute equally to developing the research process, methods, and outputs. This approach values all forms of expertise, including lived experience.

Co-ownership: An approach where the data, findings, and outputs from research are jointly owned by all those involved in the research process, including community members. This requires transparency and agreement from the outset of a project and should be ongoing as sometimes changes occur.

Co-production: A research approach where those with lived experience work in equal partnership with professionals to create research. Similar to participatory research, but with more emphasis on shared power and control throughout the entire process.

Co-researcher: A term used in participatory and co-produced research to describe community members who contribute to the research process. In *Uncertain Futures*, these were the women who brought their expertise as community organisers and leaders, activists and community representatives and worked as equal partners with researchers.

Democratisation of knowledge: The process of making knowledge accessible to all and valuing different forms of expertise equally. This includes recognising that lived experience, cultural knowledge, and community understanding are as valuable as academic expertise.

Ethic of care: A framework that emphasises relational responsibility, empathy, and attentiveness to vulnerability. In participatory research, an ethic of care involves prioritising relationships, acknowledging emotional dimensions of research, recognising interdependence between researchers and participants, and ensuring the wellbeing of all involved. It rejects purely instrumental approaches to research relationships in favour of genuine concern for participants as whole persons with complex needs.

Ethic of solidarity: A principle of mutual support and collective action based on shared interests, goals, or experiences despite differences. In participatory research, an ethic of solidarity involves researchers standing alongside communities in their struggles for justice, actively supporting community-identified priorities, challenging power imbalances, and working toward shared goals. It acknowledges that research can be a form of political action and that researchers have responsibilities to contribute to social justice beyond merely documenting issues.

Intersectionality: A theoretical framework that recognises that individuals may experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, disadvantage, or privilege based on their various social identities (such as gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc.). An intersectional approach examines how these different aspects of identity interact to create unique experiences of both oppression and advantage, recognising that individuals can simultaneously hold privileged and marginalised identities.

Knowledge exchange: The process of sharing information, ideas, and expertise between different stakeholders in a research project. This is a two-way or multi-way process rather than a one-way transfer of knowledge.

Knowledge pathways: Channels through which information flows between communities, organisations, and institutions. These can be formal (like publications) or informal (like community networks).

Life-course approach: A research perspective that examines how experiences accumulate throughout a person's life, recognising that early experiences and contexts influence later outcomes. In *Uncertain Futures*, this approach was used to explore how experiences throughout life impact women over 50 in relation to work.

Marginalised communities: Groups who are excluded from mainstream social, economic, cultural, or political life due to various factors including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, class, disability, or age.

Participatory research: A research approach that actively involves the people being studied in the research process. This might include helping to develop research questions, collect and analyse data, and disseminate findings. The aim is to create more relevant, ethical, and actionable research.

Power dynamics: The ways in which differences in social power and authority influence interactions between individuals and groups. In participatory research, addressing power imbalances between researchers and community members is essential.

Socially engaged art: Art that is collaborative, often participatory and involves people as the medium or material of the work. It emphasises social interaction, community involvement, and collaborative meaning-making.

Trauma-informed approach: A framework that recognises the prevalence of trauma and seeks to avoid re-traumatisation by emphasising safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment in all interactions.

Key Resources for Further Learning

General Participatory Research Methods:

+ Centre for Social Justice and Community Action & National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement. (2022) Community-based participatory research: A guide to ethical principles and practice (2nd edition), CSJCA & NCCPE, Durham and Bristol. Available at: Community-Based-Participatory-Research-A-Guide-to-Ethical-Principles,-2nd-edition-(2022)-.pdf
+ Involve. (2011) Pathways through Participation. What creatives and sustains active citizenship. Available at: Pathways through Participation | Involve.

Working with Diverse Communities:

+ Beebeejaun, Y., Durose, C., Rees, J., Richardson, J. and Richardson, L. (2014) 'Beyond text': exploring ethos and method in co-producing research with communities, *Community Development Journal*, Volume 49, Issue 1, January 2014, Pages 37--53, https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bst008. Available at: 'Beyond text': exploring ethos and method in co-producing research with communities | Community Development Journal | Oxford Academic
+ Participatory Action Research: A Toolkit. (2023). University of Reading. Design by Wendy Lewis. Retrieve here: https://research.reading.ac.uk/community-based-research.

Ethics and Care in Research:

+ Care Collective, The. (2023) 'The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence', London: Verso Books. Available at: https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/2625-the-care-manifesto

Creative Approaches:

+ Kara, H. (2020) 'Creative Research Methods: A Practical Guide', 2nd edn. Bristol: Policy Press. Available at: https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/creative-research-methods.
+ On the Edge Research (n/d) 'Toward an Aesthetics of Ethics', Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society, 50(3), pp. 184-199. Available at: Microsoft Word - Summary Seminar 1 Aesthetics and Ethics.doc

Policy Impact:

+ Cairney, P. and Oliver, K. (2020) 'How should academics engage in policymaking to achieve impact?', Political Studies Review, 18(2), pp. 228-244. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929918807714
+ Lightbody, R. (2017) 'Hard to reach' or 'easy to ignore'? Promoting equality in community engagement, Edinburgh: What Works Scotland. Available at: http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/hard-to-reach-or-easy-to-ignore-promoting-equality-in-community-engagement-evidence-review/

Uncertain Futures is a collaborative art and research project at Manchester Art Gallery highlighting intersectional inequalities around paid and unpaid work for women over 50 focusing on gender, age, race, migration, disability and class.

Uncertain Futures Project Team:
Advisory Group - Akhter Azabany: Manchester resident, Professor Erinma Bell: CARISMA Services, Sally Casey: Aquarius Tenants and Residents Association, Atiha Chaudry: GMBAMEN (Greater Manchester Black Asian Minority Ethnic Network), Rohina Oram: MBMEN (Manchester Black Minority Ethnic Network), Marie Greenhalgh: Wythenshawe Good Neighbours, Teodora Ilieva: Manchester resident, Dr. Tendayi Madzunzu: ZIWO (Zimbabwe Women's Organisation), Jila Mozoun: Raha – Women's Voices, Elayne Redford: Work and Skills Manchester City Council, Nadia Siddiqui: Women's Voices, Circle Steele: Wai Yin Society, Patricia Williams: Neighbourhood Community Development Team, Manchester City Council and Louise Wong: Wai Yin Society.

Artist - Suzanne Lacy
Project Lead - Ruth Edson: Senior Learning Manager, Manchester Art Gallery
Lead Researchers - Dr. Sarah Campbell: Manchester Metropolitan University and Professor Elaine Dewhurst: University of Manchester

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