

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Document Owner: Rachel Richardson

Approval Date: 22 April 2026

Review Date: April 2028

Version: 1.0



Our commitment

At Open Voice Lab, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are not a bolt-on to what we do - they are fundamental to it. Our entire purpose is to help public sector organisations hear from the communities they serve, including the people who are most often excluded from those conversations. We cannot credibly do that work without holding ourselves to the same standards we ask of our clients.

This strategy sets out how we embed EDI into everything we do - from the advice we give, to the way we work, to the partnerships we build.

Our EDI principles

Inclusion is a design choice, not an afterthought.

We believe that engagement which doesn't reach everyone isn't really engagement at all. We design inclusion in from the start - not as a compliance exercise, but because better decisions are made when more voices are heard.

We follow the evidence.

We use data, research and community insight to understand who is being excluded and why - and we design our approaches accordingly.

We are honest about barriers.

We recognise that structural inequalities exist in public sector engagement and we name them, before proactively working to address them.

We hold ourselves accountable.

We apply the same scrutiny to our own practice that we apply to our clients'.

EDI in our work with clients

This is where our EDI commitment has the greatest reach. Every piece of work we deliver is shaped by the following commitments:

Stakeholder analysis that goes beyond the obvious

We actively identify seldom-heard and underrepresented groups as part of every engagement plan - including disabled people, older and younger people, those from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, people with low digital literacy, carers, people experiencing poverty, and those with low English language proficiency.

Accessible design as standard

We apply plain English principles, readability checking, and accessibility standards to all consultation materials we produce or advise on. We do not consider a document engagement-ready if it isn't accessible and does not meet Web Compliance Accessibility Guidance (WCAG) standards.

Channel diversity

We design engagement that doesn't privilege one type of participant. Digital reach is balanced with in-person, community-based approaches that meet people where they are - not where it is convenient for the organisation.

Equality impact as a thread, not a checkbox

We support clients to consider equality impact throughout the engagement process, not just at the point of formal assessment.

Challenging exclusion when we see it

Where we identify that a client's approach risks excluding particular communities, we will say so - clearly and constructively. This is part of the service, not outside of it.

Accessibility in our training courses

We will champion the importance of accessibility in all of our training courses. We will include accessibility and inclusion as a key theme running through our Learning Labs and we will design specific courses that help progress this agenda.

EDI in how we operate

As a small consultancy, we recognise that our internal EDI footprint is different to that of a large organisation. But size is not an excuse for inaction.

Procurement and partnerships

Where we work with associates, suppliers or partners, we look for alignment with EDI values and prioritise working with people and organisations that reflect the diverse communities we serve.

Continuous learning

We commit to staying current on EDI research, policy and practice - particularly as it relates to digital engagement, accessibility and community participation. This informs both our own development and the advice we give.

Honest reflection

We will periodically review our own body of work and ask honestly: whose voices have we helped amplify? Where have our approaches fallen short? What would we do differently?

Our actions

Action	Progress
Embed an EDI checklist into our standard engagement strategy and delivery workflows (See appendix A)	Complete
Our venue suitability assessment includes key lines that support accessibility (See Health and Safety Policy)	Complete
Design standard slides around accessibility and inclusion to include in any training courses being delivered	Complete
Learning Lab on inclusive engagement practices, to be repeated annually	In progress
Include accessible Word, PDF and Forms courses in our training offer	In progress

Build EDI reflection into our project close-down process for every piece of work	Complete
Maintain and develop our knowledge of seldom-heard communities and barriers to participation – through reading and direct community relationships	Ongoing
Review policy every two years.	Ongoing

Measuring progress

We will know this strategy is working when:

- Our clients consistently report that their engagement has reached a broader and more representative range of people
- Accessibility and inclusion are raised proactively in every project, not reactively
- We can point to specific examples where our EDI approach changed who was heard - and therefore what was decided

A final word

We set up Open Voice Lab because we believe that continuous, inclusive engagement leads to better public services. That belief only means something if we are genuinely committed to inclusion in everything we do. This strategy is our public commitment to that - and we welcome being held to it.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if:

- Work activities significantly change
- Feedback indicates improvement needed in our approach

Approval

Signed: Rachel Richardson

Position: Director

Date: 22 April 2026

Appendix A – Open Voice Lab EDI Checklist

1. Planning and Design

- ☐ Have we identified all communities and groups who may be affected by this engagement, including those who are seldom heard or harder to reach?
- ☐ Have we considered potential barriers to participation for different groups - including digital access, language, disability, literacy, caring responsibilities and working patterns?
- ☐ Have we designed a range of engagement methods and channels that don't rely on a single route in?
- ☐ Have we allowed enough time and resource to reach underrepresented groups meaningfully?
- ☐ Have we checked whether previous engagement on this topic has gaps in who was heard - and planned to address those gaps?

Comments:

2. Materials and Accessibility

- ☐ Have all consultation documents been checked for plain English and readability?
- ☐ Are materials available in alternative formats on request (large print, Easy Read, audio)?
- ☐ Have we considered whether translation into other languages is needed for this project?
- ☐ Do all digital materials meet accessibility standards?
- ☐ Are online survey or consultation tools accessible on mobile devices?

Comments:

3. Equality Impact Assessment

- ☐ Have we identified which protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are most relevant to this piece of work?
- ☐ Is there a plan to complete or contribute to a full equality impact assessment using the engagement findings?

Comments:

4. Equality Monitoring

- ☐ Where a survey or questionnaire is being used, does it include equality monitoring questions?
- ☐ Do equality monitoring questions cover the relevant protected characteristics plus deprivation and veteran status
- ☐ Is there a clear privacy notice explaining how equality monitoring data will be used and stored?
- ☐ Is equality monitoring presented as optional for respondents?
- ☐ Is there a plan to analyse equality monitoring data alongside response data - so we can identify whose views are and aren't represented?

Comments:

5. Delivery

- ☐ Have we completed our venue suitability assessment and met necessary accessibility standards
- ☐ Have we considered timing of events - avoiding clashes with school holidays, religious observances, or working hours where possible?
- ☐ Are we working with trusted community organisations or intermediaries to reach people who may not engage directly?
- ☐ Is there a process and budget for handling requests for reasonable adjustments from participants?

Comments:

6. Analysis and reporting

- ☐ Have we analysed who responded - and identified any groups whose views are underrepresented in the findings?
- ☐ Where gaps exist, have we flagged this clearly in our reporting rather than presenting findings as representative of all communities?
- ☐ Have equality monitoring findings been reported alongside the main findings?

☐ Have we made recommendations for how underrepresented voices could be sought in any follow-up engagement?

Comments: