

GM=EqAl Conference 2026: Equity by Design: Practice Through Lived Experience

Attendee Feedback Summary

Breakout 3: Voice of Lived Experience

Thank you for being in the room. The Breakout 3 session on the Voice of Lived Experience was one of the most energising conversations of the Equity By Design conference. You brought expertise, challenge, and generosity. Here is what we heard, and what we're doing with it.

What the room said

The room kept coming back to power. Who holds it, who should hold it, and who currently doesn't. You named that people with lived experience are experts – and that they are routinely not treated as such. You pushed on what that actually means in practice: fair compensation, yes, but also upskilling and training as valid forms of recognition; vetting processes for organisations that want to access lived experience voices; and the right for communities to own the changes they want to see, not just advise on them.

You named what gets in the way. Short-term and inflexible funding came up on every flip chart. Re-traumatisation risk and duty of care came up repeatedly. So did the fact that 'lived experience' has become a buzzword – communities are over consulted, undercompensated, and not seeing their input change anything. Accessibility was named with real specificity: BSL interpreters that are ready before someone has to ask, scheduling built around community timetables, communications

in the right languages, and genuine cultural competence, not a box-tick.

And you named something that isn't yet in our nine principles: the feedback loop is broken. Communities contribute and then hear nothing. Implementation is not shared. There is no ongoing seeking of feedback throughout a project. That was the clearest signal from the room – and it's one we're taking forward.

What GM=EqAl heard

We heard that the nine principles are the right foundation – and that the room is ready to push them further. That's a good sign. It means people are taking the framework seriously enough to demand more of it.

We heard that remuneration is still not being treated as the non-negotiable it is. The documentation needed to protect people navigating benefits, the readiness of interpreters, the cultural competence of communications – these are design conditions,

not optional extras. If they are not in place from the start, the process is not yet designed.

We heard the accountability gap clearly: if we ask people to contribute and then don't tell them what changed as a result, we are extracting, not co-producing. We are adding a significant expansion to Principle 05 – and potentially a new principle – specifically addressing transparency and accountability after involvement ends.

We also heard what was not in the room. The voices most captured in these sessions were practitioners working with communities, not always people with direct lived experience themselves. Carers, Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities, people with mental health experiences, young people, and people with experience of the justice system were not named in the written outputs. That is a gap we are naming honestly, and it will shape how the next phase is designed.

What happens next

- The themes from this session are feeding directly into the development of the full CPD-accredited Voice of Lived Experience seminar. Your contributions are shaping what it covers and how it runs.
- The feedback accountability gap you named will be brought back for consultation as part of the principles review – we will not finalise any update without further input from people with lived experience of Policy making and related engagement exercises.
- The remuneration and benefits navigation guidance is already part of our VoLE framework. We will make sure it is included as a non-negotiable requirement in the Equity Delivery Fund commissioning process under Spaces of Hope.
- We will share a summary of what the whole conference produced – across all four breakout sessions and the closing plenary – with all participants. You will not be asked to contribute and then hear nothing.

An honest note

Some of what you named in this room – the overconsultation, the underfunding, the systems that ask questions and don't act on the answers – are not things GM=EqAI can fix on our own.

What we can do is carry your analysis directly into the spaces where those decisions are made, name what you told us, and hold the line when the system reaches for the easy version of lived experience engagement rather than the genuine one. The principles exist precisely to make that easier to name and harder to dodge. That is what we are committed to doing with them.

Questions or anything to add?

Contact the GM=EqAI team: gmeqal@vsnw.org.uk.