

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

Attendee Feedback Summary

Breakout 4: EIA Toolkit; Feedback and Peer Sign-Up

Thank you for being in the room – and in the hallway.

The EIA Toolkit engagement space ran throughout the afternoon, gathering responses to three live flip chart posters on Policy, Process and Practical Tools. The conversations that developed – between commissioners, practitioners and people with lived experience – were substantive, specific and often challenging. Here is what we heard, and what we are doing with it.

What the room said

The conversation kept returning to one core tension: **Equality Impact Assessments are legally required, but the culture around them has not caught up with the law.** Teams across organisations still treat EIAs as something that belongs to equality officers – a task to be handed off rather than a process that supports their own work. The result is assessments that happen on paper without genuinely informing decisions.

On **process**, the room had clear views. Engagement needs to happen at the start of commissioning, not as a final sign-off. Quantitative data – ONS, JSNA, Census – has a role, but it cannot do the job alone. You named that the balance between data and direct community consultation is something many organisations are still getting wrong, and that consultation fatigue is real. Communities are repeatedly asked the same questions by

different parts of the same system, with no visible outcome.

Some strong practice was named. Manchester City Council's regular engagement with staff networks and CHEM Boards was offered as an example of meaningful mechanism – though participants were clear that not all local authorities have developed equivalent structures. Tameside Council's work was referenced throughout: an Equality Board that brings together directorate leads and staff network chairs, a database of previous consultations that tracks which communities have been engaged, and a commitment to revisiting EIAs six to twelve months after implementation. Tameside have also developed accessible tools – forms, quick guides and videos – that move EIA from a specialist exercise toward something any team can engage with.

The conversation on **culture** was direct. The shift needed is not just procedural – it is a shift from 'consultation' to 'participation and involvement.' People named that this requires getting comfortable with something the sector often avoids: completing an EIA that identifies negative risks and proceeding anyway with eyes open. The example given was a library closure – an organisation may have no choice but to proceed, but proceeding without an honest EIA leaves communities with no record of what was considered, and no basis for accountability.

On **training**, the message was consistent: comprehensive training on EIA is still needed across the sector. In particular, training on intersectionality – how overlapping identities and inequalities interact – is almost entirely absent. Without it, EIAs continue to treat protected characteristics as separate categories rather than lived, layered realities. Participants also named that pockets of different practice exist within and across organisations, and that standardisation – without bureaucratisation – is both possible and necessary.

Compensation came up here too, as it did in other sessions: people giving their time to inform EIA processes should be fairly remunerated, and benefit navigation support should be built in as standard for anyone on means-tested support.

What GM=EqAl heard

We heard that EIA is being treated as a risk management exercise rather than a genuine decision-making tool. The legal obligation exists – but obligation without culture change produces documentation, not equity. The organisations doing it well are those that have made EIA a team responsibility embedded in how they work, not an equality team add-on.

We heard the proportionality question clearly: should engagement look the same for a project with minimal community impact as it does for one that fundamentally reshapes access to services? The room's answer was no – and that nuance needs to be built into any EIA framework we develop. Proportionality is not a shortcut. It is a principle.

We heard the gap between commissioning bodies and the VCFSE sector named explicitly. Charities and voluntary organisations are often closer to communities than any statutory body – but they are rarely brought into EIA processes. Sharing EIAs with the VCFSE sector for input is not standard practice. It should be.

We also heard what was not in the space. The communities most affected by the decisions that EIAs are meant to interrogate – people experiencing multiple deprivations, people whose identities intersect in ways that make them invisible to single-characteristic analysis – were not the primary voices in this session. That gap is not incidental. It is part of what the EIA toolkit needs to address.

What happens next

- The themes from this session are feeding directly into the development of GM=EqAl's EIA Toolkit. The framework will be built around the distinction between consultation and participation, and will include intersectionality as a core analytical lens rather than an optional consideration.
- The Tameside examples – the Equality Board model, the consultation database, the accessible quick guides – will be explored as potential good practice to share and adapt across Greater Manchester local authorities and commissioning bodies.
- The VCFSE engagement gap will be raised with 10GM and GMCA. EIA processes that do not include the voluntary sector's proximity to community cannot claim to be comprehensive.
- The training gap on intersectionality is something GM=EqAl is committed to addressing. We will explore how intersectionality can be embedded in EIA training rather than treated as a specialist add-on.
- The remuneration and benefit navigation issue is already part of GM=EqAl's Voice of

Lived Experience guidance. We will ensure it is explicitly included in any EIA engagement standards we publish.

- **We are recruiting for an EIA Working Group** – a small team of people who want to actively shape the toolkit's development and test it in practice. If you are interested, email gmeqal@vsnw.org.uk

An honest note

Changing EIA culture across Greater Manchester is not something GM=EqAI can do alone. The organisations that need to shift are statutory bodies, commissioning teams and funders – and some of them were not in this hallway. What we can do is carry this analysis clearly into the spaces where those decisions are made, make the case for genuine participation over performative consultation, and build tools that make it easier to do this right. That is what we are committed to. We will share back what happens as a result of what you told us.