

Co-designing research with people with intellectual disability

A practical checklist for researchers, advocates and policy makers

Find the full guide at
ndrp.org.au/at-a-glance



Before you start, check your thinking

- Am I asking if co-design is possible, or how to do it well?
- Am I planning for access and support, or seeing it as 'too hard'?
- Remember: The barrier is rarely the person; it's usually the systems.

What respectful co-design looks like

- ✓ **Start with people, not paperwork**
Involve people before the grant is written, not after funding is secured.
- ✓ **Use communication that works**
Easy Read, plain language, visuals, real examples. Say less, more clearly.
- ✓ **Build in time and support**
Allow time to plan, meet, reflect, adapt. Build-in breaks and support needs.
- ✓ **Pay fairly**
This is skilled, lived experience expertise, not volunteering.
- ✓ **Share decision-making power**
People help shape what the research is about, how it's done, and how it's shared.
- ✓ **Work on relationships**
Partner with advocacy organisations led by people with intellectual disability.

People with intellectual disability bring insight, clarity and lived experience that is essential to research and meaningful change.

How co-design works in practice

Approaches that work:

With children and young people

- Use storyboards, drawing, or role play.
- Let people choose how they participate.
- Involve trusted adults in supportive (not directive) roles.
- Provide visuals, movement, and play as part of your methods.

With adults

- Allow time for reflection and decision-making in every workshop.
- Try creative methods: zines, photos, videos. Let people lead.
- Involve people as co-presenters, co-authors, or co-facilitators.
- Use digital tools with symbol support or voice navigation.

How to build strong partnerships

- ✓ Allow time to prepare before sessions and for a debrief after.
- ✓ Use consistent facilitators because relationships build trust.
- ✓ Be ready to slow down, pivot, or adapt based on what people need.
- ✓ Budget for access, support, and participation from the start and review as you go.
- ✓ Confirm understanding by checking in, not testing.
- ✓ Respect support-needs as part of the process. Don't view them as a barrier.

Remember: If your research affects people with intellectual disability, it needs to be designed and conducted *by* and *with* people with intellectual disability.



National Disability
Research Partnership

*Research by and with
people with disability*

Want more?

Scan the QR or visit
ndrp.org.au/at-a-glance



Find the full Evidence to Action resource pack, DANA report, templates, worksheets, and learn about upcoming research opportunities.