The Barrier-First Method Guide

Identify the barriers each stakeholder group faces — then choose methods that address those barriers. Never the other way around.

Content Awareness

Community doesn't know the project or engagement exists.

Methods: Targeted social media, letterbox drops, local media, community radio, direct email to known groups.

Perceived Relevance

Community knows the project but doesn't see why it affects them.

Methods: Reframe around local priorities. Peer-to-peer invitations through trusted community members.

Process Access

Logistical barriers: timing, venue, transport, disability access, childcare.

Methods: Flexible hours, accessible venues, online options, childcare provision, home visits.

Language

Primary language differs from the language engagement is conducted in.

Methods: Translated materials, bilingual facilitators, community language sessions, interpreter services.

Time

Competing demands (shift work, caregiving) make participation prohibitive.

Methods: Short-format options, asynchronous participation via video or online comment, pop-up sessions.

Trust

Low trust in the organisation, process, or this specific project.

Methods: Trusted intermediaries, peer engagement, community-led sessions, track record transparency.

Digital Access

Lack of internet, devices, or digital literacy for online participation.

Methods: Paper-based options, phone surveys, library drop-ins. Printed materials as primary — not supplement.

The same methods produce the same gaps. Change the starting point — identify barriers first, then choose methods.