



Guidelines on preparing a Contributor Experience document/letter

What is a “Contributor Experience” letter?

Television is an unfamiliar world for most people. Taking part in a TV programme can be more demanding, and the consequences more far-reaching, than many would imagine.

We, therefore, want to make sure that potential contributors to our programmes are as informed as possible, as early as possible, about what they are agreeing to. We want to give them a clear understanding about the casting, filming & post-filming process, the nature and format of the show they are taking part in, and both the upsides and downsides of taking part.

Although many if not most contributors will be asked to sign a formal release or other contractual documents, we want to be sure contributors have given ‘informed consent’ before they do so, and a contributor experience letter in non-legalistic language can often assist with that, summarising the terms of engagement that they are agreeing to. It is also a great place to explain (in brief) how we will deal with their personal and more sensitive personal data. However, we would always expect a separate privacy notice to be made available to contributors which fully explains how their personal information will be used and what their rights are. There are legal requirements around what should be included in privacy notices so you should ensure you have obtained your own legal advice about the contents.

It is therefore recommended that all productions, whether within the ITV Plc family of production labels or those produced by independent producers for broadcast on ITV channels, who intend to cast members of the public, should write a contributor experience letter document at the start of production, ready for issue.

The “contributor experience” letter can come in different formats, depending on the programme. Some producers may want to use a two-stage document, one for pre-casting, and one for contributors that have been cast in the programme. Others with a less involved or lengthy casting process may want to use one document to be sent out to the final cast. Large budget series with multiple elements such as ‘Saturday Night Takeaway’ or ‘The Voice’ may wish to send out different letters at various stages within the audition, filming and post filming process. But whichever format you feel is right for your programme, please ensure that the key areas below are included.

There is no definitive way to write these documents. Each production entity or label has its own identity, and the programmes they make are extremely diverse. If in doubt, discuss with your Head of Production.

Prior to use, it is the production team’s responsibility to ensure that these documents or templates are seen by your Legal team, and ITV Compliance team.

What should be included:

Who we are:

Tell the contributor about your label/company, its vision, and the programmes you make.

About the series they are taking part in:

Briefly explain the overall format of your show

Informed Consent:

Try to use 'plain English' and explain industry/legal terms of art. For example:

Before taking part in 'programme title X' you will be asked to sign a [contestant agreement / release and consent form]. This is a formal contract between yourself and [ITV Studios/production company]. Please do read this carefully, and if you are unclear about anything in the contract please ask us to explain, or get independent legal advice.

The contract records that you are agreeing for us to own 'all rights' of any footage we film of you "in perpetuity". This means that we own the copyright of the footage of you forever.

*We will be able to **edit, copy or translate** the footage of your contribution and use this across **all media platforms, worldwide**. This means that we can repeat the programme and play it on other television channels or services around the world. We may also use clips and images from the programme on other platforms, such as social media or providing clips to the press, and we may allow the use of those clips in other later programmes.*

We do not offer "approval" rights to our contributors. This means, given the practicalities of production, you will not be shown the final edited programme before it is delivered to the broadcaster to be shown on television.

Logistics:

Advise contributors on the practical elements of a production such as dates, times, location of filming. Any information that may be relevant to your filming eg what to wear, what to expect on location, travel arrangements, food and drink etc. Request that they advise you of any special requirements they have.

Point of Contact:

Always provide details of the person who will be the point of contact for the full duration of the production. This may be a member of a casting team, a senior producer or a series producer. It should be made clear that this person is available for them to flag any concerns before, during or after filming (on a time limited basis), and who they should go after TX.

Pre-screening Questionnaire, access to medical records and psychological assessments:

If your programme has a medium or higher risk assessment in terms of contributors' welfare, you may be required to request them to complete a 'Pre-screening questionnaire' and in certain circumstances to undergo a psychological assessment, and particularly on higher risk shows allow ITV and our chosen mental health professional and legal advisors access medical records when assessing fitness to participate.

Outline these procedures to participants depending on what is to your programme. In this regard see [ITV's guidelines on Protecting Participant](#)

[Explain that this information will be processed in line with your privacy notice and any consents the contributor has provided.](#)

Experience on the show and after – upsides & downsides:

There are positives and negatives to appearing on TV, and potential contributors, especially those that have no prior experience of being in the public eye, should be given some understanding of these before taking part. These upsides and downsides will vary greatly according to the nature of the programme, but some areas for consideration are below, along with some examples of how these could be addressed:

"We want to make sure all our contributors are fully aware of the nature of the programme and its production, so that the experience of taking part is as enjoyable as possible. In light of this, please be aware of the following:..."

- There may be a demanding schedule with long filming hours that may overrun. If possible, give an idea of your schedule:

“Filming can sometimes be a long and tiring process. Whilst we do everything we can to stick to a schedule and to agreed timings, there is always a possibility of there being some waiting time, overrunning and later than expected finishing times.”

- In reality, entertainment and factual entertainment programmes, there is often comment on participants from other participants, or from the presenter or programme voiceover, or other contributors. Ensure that contributors understand this aspect of the programme format eg:

“In this programme participants will be asked to give their honest opinions of other guests, just as you may be asked for your thoughts on other participants. It is possible that some of these opinions might be negative; likewise the [presenter/narrator] will sometimes comment humorously on participants and events.”

- Social media ‘trolling’ is one of the biggest issues for many programme participants in a wide range of programmes. We should warn contributors about this possibility and send them practical advice and our guidelines on social media prior to first transmission:

“Appearing on television can sometimes bring unwanted attention via Social Media. You will be offered support and guidance closer to transmission, but be aware that negative comments about people appearing on TV can be made by complete strangers on Social Media and this is not something we can control, although we can offer advice and support should it occur. We strongly suggest that you make your social media accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat) private to your family and close friends only prior to, and for some time following, the transmission date(s) on which you will appear.

After filming:

Contributors may be uncertain about what happens after filming and before transmission. Programmes should consider carefully what ‘aftercare’ is appropriate to offer contributors after transmission. This should be outlined to them in the contributor experience letter/document. Transmission is often weeks or months after filming, and subject to scheduling decisions outside the producers’ control, and to last minute changes. Again, make this clear beforehand.

Aftercare will vary from programme to programme, depending on your schedule, how quickly after production the programme is due to TX, and the risk factors set out in ITV’s protecting participants guidelines. For higher risk shows this might include a period of check-ins, psychological assessment and therapy. But even for lower risk programmes it should include “checking” in with them after filming, shortly before transmission with a TX date, and after TX to see how they are doing. If they are anxious or upset, or cause concern to the person checking in with them, we might consider suggesting they speak to a mental health professional .

Signposting:

During the casting process you may be asking applicants to talk about distressing times in their lives. We need to consider the impact that this might have, whether or not they eventually take part in the programme. Where relevant it may be worth including signposting information, such as:

MIND: Provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. www.mind.org.uk

Big White Wall: Supports people experiencing common mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, helping people to manage their own mental health. It is available 24/7, manned by trained Wall Guides, who make sure the community is safe and supportive, and everyone remains anonymous. www.bigwhitewall.com

Samaritans: Offer a safe place for you to talk anytime you like, in your own way, about whatever is getting to you. www.samaritans.org

CALM: The Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) is dedicated to preventing male suicide, the single biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK. www.thecalmzone.net