

SAFE SPACES

Toolkit 1

Walking Interviews



Understanding and enhancing safety
and inclusion for diverse women

The **Victorian Government** acknowledges Victorian Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We acknowledge and respect that Aboriginal communities are steeped in traditions and customs built on a disciplined social and cultural order that has sustained 60,000 years of existence. We acknowledge the significant disruptions to social and cultural order and the ongoing hurt caused by colonisation.

The Safe Spaces team acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our universities are located and where we conduct our research. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present. We acknowledge the ongoing effects of colonisation on Indigenous and First Nations people in Australia and elsewhere and the harmful ways research has further marginalised people who had their lands, their families and their lives stolen. We commit to being better researchers and allies to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This toolkit is one of three designed by the Safe Spaces team to assist local councils and related organisations in understanding safety and inclusion for women in public places.

What is included in each toolkit?

- A **blueprint** with general principles to bear in mind when engaging with diverse groups of women.
- A **set of practices** to support local councils and stakeholders in collecting useful data about women's experiences in public places.

These three toolkits represent the outputs from the *Safe Spaces: Understanding and enhancing safety and inclusion for diverse women* report developed for the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Welcoming Cities, local councils, community members and related organisations.



'Understanding and enhancing safety and inclusion for diverse women' is a collaboration between Monash University, Griffith University, University of Sydney, Wyndham City Council, Melton City Council, Monash City Council and Welcoming Cities.

RESEARCH LEAD

Professor Rebecca Wickes

CO-DESIGN LEAD

Associate Professor Nicole Kalms

CHIEF INVESTIGATORS

Dr Charishma Ratnam, Professor Murray Lee, Dr Gill Matthewson and Professor Silke Meyer

PROJECT MANAGER

Rebecca Powell

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Isabella Webb

PROJECT PARTNERS

Aleem Ali and Bel Schenk from Welcoming Australia
Rayna Berg and Elizabeth Johnston from Melton City Council
Colin Bostock, Tracey Egan and Fee Harrison from City of Monash
Holly Claridge, Clifford Eberley, Paula Hearnden, Cheree Hunter and Lexi King from Wyndham City Council

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM

Rebecca Grime from Department of Justice and Community Safety, Victorian Government
Chelsea Waylen and Isabella Webb from Monash University XYXLab
Prabhapriya Boogoda Arachchige, Lindsey Desmons, Claire Moran, Danielle Taylor, Rose Unal Wynn and Nuri Veronika from Monash University Faculty of Arts

DEDICATION

The Safe Spaces team dedicates this research and the resultant toolkits to the women from Wyndham, Melton and Monash communities who participated in this project. Over the course of this project, the Safe Spaces team engaged and collaborated with nearly 200 women from a range of cultural backgrounds and age groups and with a range of abilities. This project has only been possible thanks to their generosity, intelligence, curiosity and time.

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Key definitions

CO-DESIGN

Co-design brings together diverse participants using design principles and practices to solve real-world problems. It is a mode for shared decision-making and actively involves various stakeholders. The objective is not solely to achieve an outcome, but also to build meaningful collaboration into the design process and between participants. Co-design ideally engages a range of people – including those with 'lived experience' of the issues – to explore and test possible solutions. As a participatory process it is a form of community engagement that can be used for a range of disciplines, including policy development, planning practice and design more broadly.

INCLUSION

In the context of this toolkit, inclusion refers to the feeling of belonging to a community and/or place and the ability to participate fully in social life free from discrimination or disadvantage.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality refers to how different aspects of a person's identity can result in overlapping forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Social identities that might contribute to intersectionality can include Indigeneity, ethnicity, race, sex, sexuality, gender identity, parent or carer status, disability, mental health, religion, migrant and/or refugee status and experience, age, socioeconomic status and background, cultural background, educational background and community background. It is important to note that some intersectional criteria change over time, meaning that a woman's identity, needs and priorities may change across her life course.

PUBLIC PLACES

Public places are those that community members can access without payment or membership. Examples of public places include green spaces, walking/cycling trails, local parks, libraries, community centres and the areas adjacent to public transport hubs.

SAFETY

We refer to the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of safety as 'the state of being protected from or guarded against hurt or injury; freedom from danger'.¹ However, safety means different things to different people, and it will likely vary across places and time. Women's safety is place-based and subjective. The social and behavioural elements of places and spaces cannot be separated from the built environment.

WOMEN

This project has undertaken research with women in all their diversity. Women are not a homogenous group and differ in terms of their cultural background, socioeconomic status, sexuality, disability and age and where they live. Work in communities is about gender-diverse people too. The Research Team encourages communities to work with a wide range of women and across the breadth of gender in their communities.

¹ OED Online, 2023.



Introduction

Communal public places, such as parks, nature reserves and community hubs, are important spaces for developing social networks. They can support social inclusion and create a sense of belonging for local residents. Equally, they can generate feelings of social exclusion and concerns about safety.

Background

Public places differ in their capacity to offer and support safety and inclusion. For example, a park in one neighbourhood may not evoke the same feelings of safety as a park located elsewhere. Moreover, different users of the same park might experience it as 'safe' or 'unsafe'. Adding to this dynamic, impressions of safety may change as day turns to night. Parks can function as a crime generator, a crime attractor or a crime detractor at different times of the day.²

We know that some groups do not feel safe in their community and actively avoid some public places out of concern for their safety or the safety of their families. This is particularly true for women, especially women from non-English-speaking backgrounds.³

Understanding the specific physical and social elements of public places that lead to feelings of concern and exclusion (including self-exclusion) is foundational to developing strategies that support inclusion and safety for women.

² Corcoran et al., 2021.

³ Fanghanel, 2015; Neal et al., 2015; Rishbeth et al., 2019; Nagaraj Naik, 2020.

Aims

The Safe Spaces project was developed to build local council capability to better understand why some public places are viewed as 'unsafe' and to provide local councils and other community-focused organisations with engagement strategies to connect with women and ultimately improve women's perceptions of safety in public places. The project involved collaborations with women from a range of cultural backgrounds and age groups and with a range of abilities living in the Melton, Monash and Wyndham Local Government Areas (LGAs).

The project worked with known problems faced by each of the councils. **This baseline knowledge of crime and safety in the three council areas underpinned the Project Team's approach to:**

- identifying women's awareness of both the problems in public places and approaches needed to address them
- understanding women's experiences in and around these places and the specific physical and social cues that are present, or absent, in public places that lead women to feel unsafe
- examining different strategies to improve safety in public places that emerge through a co-design process.

Methodology

The Project Team developed a multi-pronged research design that involved a series of engagements with women from the community, local council staff, Welcoming Cities staff and crime prevention experts from the Department of Justice and Community Safety. All those involved in the project participated in the co-design workshop, which developed a shared understanding of safety and inclusion issues and their possible solutions.

The evidence accumulated from the research activities reveals why some public places are seen as 'unsafe' or not inclusive. It provides critical insights that can be harnessed by local councils to engage women to improve safety and inclusion in public places. These insights also allow for strengthened partnerships within and across local councils and the development of socially and culturally relevant strategies that target safety and inclusion for diverse groups of women.



Engaging safety and inclusion in public places for women: A blueprint for local councils

In this section, we provide a blueprint for local councils and other organisations to enhance engagement with women regarding their safety and inclusion in public places. It draws from the Safe Spaces project and the wider literature. The blueprint provides core principles to keep in mind when engaging women and assists in identifying the core goals that underpin the project/engagement.

This blueprint is the precursor to all three engagement toolkits developed through the Safe Spaces project. Understanding and enhancing safety and inclusion in public places for women requires a gender-sensitive approach that includes partnerships within and across local councils, state governments and other relevant organisations. Most importantly, it requires partnerships with women from a range of cultural backgrounds and age groups and with diverse abilities and sexual and gender identities because women are not a homogenous group. Enhancing safety and inclusion in public places is therefore dependent on approaches that acknowledge the differences between women and other users of public places. It requires an ongoing process of engagement, monitoring and development.

Respectful engagement

The people in our cities are diverse, but those who control the public spaces and places of the city have typically been men. Consequently, women predominantly live and work in environments built and made by men that cater to men's needs, wants and interests. When public space planning does not account for gender, as Caroline Criado Perez states, public spaces 'become male spaces by default'.⁴ Unsurprisingly, women from all walks of life share similar experiences of harassment in public places. Yet women are not always at the table to design the strategies needed to enhance their safety and inclusion.

Women have diverse histories, resulting in different experiences and needs relating to engagement on issues of safety and inclusion.

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT REQUIRES:

1. An approach that is sensitive to women's:

AGE

SEXUALITY

GENDER IDENTITY

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

PHYSICAL AND COGNITIVE ABILITIES

LITERACY

CHILD/FAMILY CARE NEEDS

CULTURAL NEEDS

2. An awareness of access requirements including

PUBLIC TRANSPORT ACCESSIBILITY

SAFE CAR PARKING OPTIONS

ACCESS FOR MOBILITY AIDS

AMENITIES FOR WOMEN
EG TOILETS, PARENTS' ROOMS AND PRAYER SPACES

3. Facilitators who

ARE TRAINED TO ENGAGE WITH WOMEN FROM A RANGE OF BACKGROUNDS

UNDERSTAND WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC PLACES

ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE MATERIALS/CONDUCT RESEARCH IN A MANNER THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES AND LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS

⁴ Criado Perez, 2019.

Understanding the purpose of the engagement

Knowing when and how to engage women in the community is the first step to improving their perceptions of safety and inclusion. Local councils must first understand where and why women feel unsafe and excluded to enhance safety and inclusion in public places. This requires gathering information from various sources. Depending on the availability of time and resources and the type of information needed, there are different approaches that can be used.

APPROACH	WHAT IT REVEALS	WHAT IT DOES NOT REVEAL
<p>Environmental Scan</p> <p>What it involves: An analysis of publicly available information such as police crime reports, media reports, community Facebook posts and local council surveys</p>	<p>Where the known problems are occurring</p> <p>How problems are reported through formal (news media) and informal (social media) channels</p> <p>The potential targets and perpetrators of the problem</p>	<p>How problems are understood by women</p> <p>If the problems are heightening women's fear and feelings of unsafety</p> <p>If women have changed their behaviours/mobility as a consequence of the problems</p>
<p>Surveys, focus groups or one-on-one interviews</p> <p>What it involves: Asking questions about local problems and feelings of safety and inclusion across a diverse range of women in the local council area</p>	<p>What the known problems are and where they are occurring</p> <p>How women from different backgrounds perceive the problems</p> <p>If the problems are heightening women's fear and feelings of unsafety</p> <p>If women have changed their behaviours/mobility as a consequence of the problems</p>	<p>How problems present on different days or at different times of the day and night</p> <p>Information on different users of the public places of interest</p> <p>Information on the potential guardianship/place management of the area</p> <p>Safety strategies that might influence the use of public places for different user groups</p>
<p>Walking interviews</p> <p>What it involves: Walking with women in those public places where they feel unsafe or excluded</p>	<p>The attributes of the public places that create feelings of unsafety or exclusion</p> <p>Insights from women about how places change at different times of the day or night</p> <p>Information on the potential guardianship/place management of the area</p> <p>Insights on strategies that women feel may improve the safety and inclusion of the area</p>	<p>How other users may experience the place</p> <p>Safety strategies that might influence the use of the public place for different user groups</p>

If the goal is to **change the social and/or physical infrastructure of public places where women feel unsafe or excluded**, active engagement with a diverse range of women is needed and co-design strategies are particularly useful. To ensure that the ambitions of the co-design engagement are appropriate, one or more of the types of engagement shown in the table above should be deployed.

APPROACH	WHAT IT ACHIEVES	WHAT IT DOES NOT REVEAL
Co-design What it involves: Active collaboration between designers and stakeholders throughout the design process that utilises bespoke probes and tools	Challenges the imbalance of power between users and those who determine public spaces and places Supports strong empathy Encourages capacity of participants	Immediate steps forward

Time and resource limitations

Engagement approaches will vary in both the time they take and the resources needed.

SCOPE

The effort required to fulfil the approach, which includes staffing requirements, inclusion of external stakeholders, project complexity and level of detail required

TIME/ SCHEDULE

The time required for each approach in the project's overarching schedule, which includes planning and strategy, internal calendars, number of occurrences in project phases and hours required

BUDGET/ COST

The financial constraints of the project, which include financial budget, number of team members, external stakeholders, and materials and facilities

APPROACH	SCOPE	TIME / SCHEDULE	BUDGET / COST
Surveys	●	●	● ● ●
Focus groups	● ●	● ●	●
Interviews	● ●	● ● ●	● ●
Walking interviews	● ●	● ● ●	● ●
Participatory engagement	● ● ●	● ●	● ● ●
Co-design	● ● ●	● ●	● ● ●

LOW
EFFORT

MEDIUM
EFFORT

SIGNIFICANT
EFFORT

RELATIVELY
QUICK

SOMEWHAT
TIME CONSUMING

TIME
CONSUMING

RESOURCE
LIGHT

RESOURCE
MODERATE

RESOURCE
INTENSIVE

Who to engage

Regardless of method, the goal is to understand what makes women feel safe/unsafe and included/excluded. This requires engaging with women across different age groups, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, sexual and gender identities as well as cognitive, physical and psychological abilities. It is also important to understand women's relationship to the public places you wish to improve. Do they frequently or infrequently engage with the place in question? Do they actively avoid the place? Are there physical and/or cultural barriers that hinder their engagement with the place?

Depending on the place of concern, there may be other groups whose voices and experiences should be incorporated into any change to the social and physical structure.

Consider engagement opportunities with groups such as:

- local businesses or community groups and organisations that are situated near to the place of concern
- state government agencies, with whom partnerships may be needed to make changes to certain places (for example, public transport stations)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, because placemaking takes place on their unceded lands
- young people, who also benefit from having access to public spaces but may not feel included in these places.

Supporting women to engage

Women are busy people! They often have primary caring responsibilities for children and extended family members. According to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics census data, the vast majority of women in Australia are in paid employment.⁵ Women are also more likely to engage in volunteering than men. Women's time is valuable, and their ideas are critically important. To encourage women's participation, local councils need to:

- consider times and timelines for engagement. The 9–5, Monday to Friday working schedule may not suit all women and weekends or weeknights might be more amenable.
- offer women compensation for their time, depending on what is asked of them. Stipends or honorariums are appropriate when asking women to go beyond participating in a short survey.
- provide childcare or child-friendly engagements, because women are very often the primary caregivers of children.
- provide the right support for women with disabilities to encourage their engagement – accessibility is key.

⁵ Volunteering Australia, 2023.

One size does not fit all. Multiple engagement strategies may be needed to connect with a diverse range of women. This may include targeting approaches to community leaders, developing recruitment flyers in different languages, attending relevant events or activities where women are likely to be present, and being clear about expectations.

Communicating outcomes to women

Communicating the actionable outcomes of your engagement with women in your local council area is crucial. It signals respect for those who have given up their time to engage with the project. Moreover, it allows women to validate or challenge the conclusions or decisions that flow from the engagement. The [Centre for Global Development](#) provides useful tips to help you decide how to share the results of your engagement. Remember, women are not a homogenous group so, again, accessibility is key. You will likely need to communicate the outcomes of your engagement using different audio and visual materials, and you may need to consider translating the outcomes into the main languages spoken by your women participants. Straightforward language is essential.

How do you know you are doing it right?

Engagement with the women in your local community should not be a one-off experience. As discussed in the report that accompanies these toolkits, improving safety and inclusion is an ongoing process that involves maintaining relationships with women in your community. Monitoring and evaluating a new strategy is the only way to ensure you have the design fit for purpose.



Engagement framework: walking interviews with women

This section of the toolkit provides a set of practices developed by the Safe Spaces team to assist local councils and related organisations with collecting useful data about women's safety and inclusion in public places using walking interviews. A walking interview is a qualitative research method that explores people's connections with a place. Walking interviews generate rich and informative insights because participants are prompted by connections, meanings, feelings and memories in the places they are walking through and 'are less likely to try and give the "right" answer'.⁶

A walking interview involves a researcher accompanying their participant(s), on foot, during an interview in a specific location. Walking interviews can be driven either by the researcher or the participant who determines the location of the interview and/or the walking route. The place may or may not be familiar to the participant or the researcher. The place or route depends on the context of the research and the issue that is being investigated.

⁶ Evans & Jones, 2011.

Summary

Nature and purpose

- A walking interview is a qualitative research method that explores people's connections with place
- It involves a researcher accompanying their participant(s), on foot, during an interview in a specific location
- Walking interviews can be driven either by the researcher or the participant who determines the location of the interview and/or the walking route
- There are three types of walking interview: go-alongs, participatory walking interviews, and walking tours
- The researcher must carefully consider the needs of women and plan walking interviews in consultation with them

Advantages

- Walking interviews allow participants to discuss experiences or attitudes when prompted by what they see in a place
- Walking interviews help to understand place through the eyes and experiences of participants
- Researchers can ask participants more concrete and targeted questions and quickly respond to non-verbal cues
- There is more flexibility involved; determining the place of the interview, who is familiar with the area, and who chooses the route of the walk can be negotiated between the researcher and the participant or can be based on the topic of the project

Challenges

- Walking is not for everyone – the comfort levels and mobility restrictions of women must be considered
- Factor potential weather, noise levels (such as busyness, traffic, and construction), access for mobility aids, and the time of day into your plans

Ethical considerations

- Create an explanatory statement for distribution to potential participants
 - Ensure you receive signed consent from each participant
 - Decide whether and how you will record the interview
 - Discuss whether and how participants' confidentiality will be maintained
 - Participants should be aware that the researcher will accompany them during the walk
-

Interview types

There are three main types of walking interviews that could be useful in understanding specific places: go-alongs, participatory walking interviews and walking tours.

A **go-along interview** is a hybrid of interviewing and observing a participant during their everyday routines.⁷ The aim is to understand the role of place in the participant's everyday life through studying their habitual movements on the day and at the time when they usually occur (such as running errands or walking the dog). Go-alongs allow a researcher to observe a participant's spatial practices in situ while asking questions that prompt discussions of their experiences and interpretations.

A **participatory walking interview** involves the participant and researcher walking through a place that the participant has selected.⁸ Most of the time, the chosen place is relevant to the subject matter of the project; for example, in a project about safety in green spaces, the participant would select a park that they use or have avoided using for safety reasons. This type of walking interview captures participants' past experiences in, attitudes towards and perceptions of a particular place. It is often used to better understand the sense of attachment to places in the local neighbourhood. For participatory walking interviews, the participant chooses where to meet, the route to walk and what they want to show the researcher, and they must lead the interview, given they are the experts in the chosen area.

A **walking 'tour'** involves a researcher and a participant walking around a number of distinct public locations that are proximate to each other to elicit responses to specific, predetermined sites. For example, they might meet at a park, walk to a nearby train station and then a lake, and then finally walk to a monument. At each site, participants evaluate their feelings of comfort and familiarity using a scale (from 1 to 5, for example) and then rank, in order of importance, the reasons for their responses (such as, 'people around me', 'physical attributes such as the architecture and amenities here' or 'environmental factors like the weather, time of day or day of the week').⁹ Sometimes these tours might end with an open and unstructured reflection, allowing participants to express their feelings about visiting the sites and how those feelings shifted as they walked between sites.

The choice of the type of walking interview may be based on a specific place, type of place (e.g., parks/greenspaces) or mobility route. For example, the participatory walking interview would be a useful approach if women have felt unsafe using trails in their local area. The choice may also be informed by the kind of information that you are seeking. If there are places that women think are unsafe, then holistically understanding how women move through these places, or even avoid them, will be important to inform strategies to improve feelings of safety and inclusion.

7 Kusenbach, 2003.

8 Clark & Emmel, 2010.

9 Paulos & Goodman, 2004.

Conducting walking interviews with women requires careful consideration of their needs, personal contexts and experiences. Given that women are often subject to harmful experiences in public places, it is important to plan and manage walking interviews in close consultation with women.

When planning walking interviews, researchers must consider the religious and cultural needs of particular groups. Some women feel safer walking with other women, so the researcher involved may need to identify as a woman. Others might want a companion (friend or family member) to join them. Whether the companion wants to participate in the discussion should be negotiated before the walking interview commences.

Women are often carers and may bring their children to the interview. If children attend walking interviews, another researcher may need to attend to them during the walk or provide activities to keep the children occupied. Other women may have physical impairments that affect their mobility, in which case a stationary interview may be more appropriate, based in a selected location.

Advantages of walking interviews with women

Walking interviews offer opportunities for participants to express themselves more than just verbally. Participants might be prompted by things they see in a place to discuss certain experiences or attitudes. Being in certain locations can support their narratives or prompt responses to questions that may not emerge during a traditional sit-down interview. Walking interviews help researchers understand places through the eyes and experiences of their participants. Researchers can develop an understanding of people's connections to particular places, their interactions with people in their local community and feelings of isolation or loneliness that may become apparent through their movements in a place. Researchers can also observe the participant in a place and the place itself.

Challenges of walking interviews with women

Walking does not necessarily suit everyone. Some participants are not able to walk long distances, while others may have mobility restrictions. As such, walking interviews may not always be appropriate. Similar insights may still be gained by using an online map, and researchers can also complete their own observations of places alongside digital interviews.

Given that walking interviews often take place in open areas, some environmental and contextual factors may create limitations. When planning, researchers should consider the weather, levels of noise in the designated place of the interview (such as busyness, traffic and construction), access for mobility aids, and the time of day. Establishing contingency plans and prioritising safety are critical.

Ethical considerations for walking interviews with women

It is important to consider ethical procedures. An explanatory statement outlining the project, what participation involves, the risks and benefits of participating, how participants will be de-identified (or not) in the reporting of the results, and the contact details of the project leader is always useful. This can be widely distributed alongside a consent form. Researchers should consider whether and how they want to record the walking interview. The choice of recording depends on the aims of the project and the comfort of the participants, who must be informed about what, how and when the researcher will record. Recording techniques include:

- handheld voice recorders
- handwritten notes
- video recording systems.

Maintaining the confidentiality of the participant is important. Participants should also be advised that members of the public may overhear their conversations. The researcher should discuss how, or whether, they will maintain the participant's confidentiality when they report the results of the walking interviews. A confidentiality plan should be outlined in the project's explanatory statement and the signed consent form.

Getting ready for walking interviews with women

Decide what type is best suited to the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the remit of your project? • Who are the participants you want to engage with? • What type of information are you seeking? 	□
Ensure proper ethical processes are in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What approvals do you need from your organisation to conduct walking interviews? • Have you created a memo that outlines information about your project for a public audience? This type of document can be useful for recruiting participants. • How will you record the walking interviews? • How will participants give their consent to participate in the walking interviews? 	□
Be ready with the core questions that are important to your project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider open-ended questions that elicit long responses. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Why did you choose this area for our walking interview today? » Can you show me which parts of this space you use regularly and explain what you use them for? » How would you feel walking through this space by yourself? • Collect demographic information – such as a participant's age, residence, postcode, years living in that postcode, gender and sexuality – in a short survey to save time. 	□
Have a clear plan in place before setting off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you record the walking interview? • How, and by whom, will the location and route of the walking interview be chosen? • What types of cues will you look out for during the walking interview? 	□
During the walking interview, look out for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • markers in the physical environment • non-verbal cues of the participants (such as gestures, tone of voice and emotions) • other people in the surrounding areas you walk through 	□
Manage your data ethically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will manage all the data, such as the interview recording, transcripts, observational notes and demographic forms? • Where will you store the data? • Who will be given access to the data? • Plan to destroy the data once your project has been published and acquitted. 	□
Share the data with participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you share the findings with your participants? Consider clear and concise communications. • Can you share participants' stories in innovative ways? Think about using visual and digital media. • How will you ensure that participants' stories are reflective of their experiences? 	□



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Publicly available resources

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CONTACTS

For more information about this resource or to share feedback, please contact:

Professor Rebecca Wickes,
Griffith University Criminology Institute
r.wickes@griffith.edu.au

Associate Professor Nicole Kalms,
Monash University YXX Lab
nicole.kalms@monash.edu