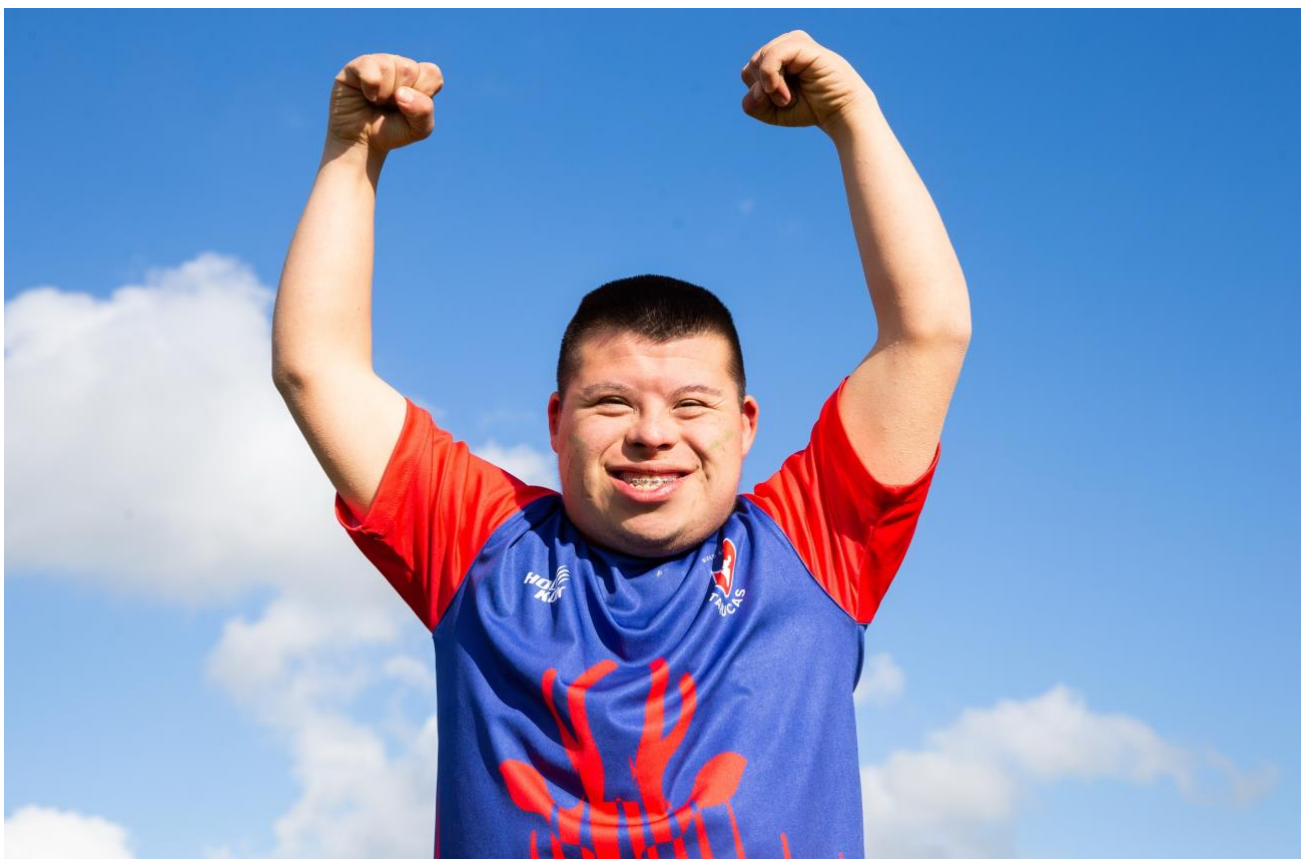


Co-Production Guidelines

Learning from MAGIC 2025

A practical guide for clubs and event organisers staging co-produced inclusive events



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Introduction

Mixed Ability sport is built on a simple but radical idea: everyone regardless of (dis)ability or other circumstances can play, together, without being separated or classified. IMAS (International Mixed Ability Sports) was founded to tackle the lack of opportunities for disabled people to be equal members in their community sports clubs – and co-production sits at the very heart of how it works.

Building on the learning from the Mixed Ability Games, Inclusion and Co-production event (MAGIC) held in Pamplona, Spain, in June 2025, we have created these guidelines for clubs, event organisers and anyone wanting to stage truly inclusive, co-produced Mixed Ability events. It also draws on IMAS's lived experience and the evidence gathered from years of practice. There is no single roadmap for co-production – but these pages will give you the principles, the 'why', the 'how', and the practical guidance you need to get started.

What is co-production?

Co-production is a process in which an organisation works alongside people with relevant lived experience throughout the entire work – from start to finish – forming and sustaining equal partnerships where no one group is more important than any other.

In the context of Mixed Ability sport, co-production means that disabled people – particularly those with lived experience of exclusion from mainstream sport – are active and equal partners in designing, running and evaluating events and activities. It is not consultation (asking for views but making decisions elsewhere). It is not engagement (giving people more say but keeping control). It is genuine partnership, with shared power and shared ownership.

Co-production is most powerful when it becomes embedded in everything you do – not a one-off project, but a way of working.

Co-production vs. other approaches

Approach	What it looks like	Is it co-production?
Inform	Sharing information about a planned event with disabled people	No – passive, no power
Consult	Surveying disabled people about a proposed format, but keeping control of the final decision	No – views may be ignored
Engage	Running workshops with disabled people to understand their needs, but decisions remain with the organiser	No – limited influence
Co-design	Designing the event format together, but not involving people in delivery or review	Partial – shared design only
Co-produce	Involving disabled people at every stage: planning, design, delivery, and evaluation – as equal partners	Yes – full partnership

Why co-production matters in Mixed Ability sport

Co-production is not just good practice – for Mixed Ability sport, it is essential. When disabled people are excluded from planning and decision-making, events risk being inaccessible, unwelcoming or tokenistic. When they are included as equal partners, the results are transformational – for participants, for clubs, and for society.

Benefits for clubs & organisers	Benefits for participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More inclusive events from the start – fewer barriers• Better understanding of what disabled people need• Stronger community relationships and reputation• Outcomes that funders and stakeholders value• Resources reflecting real lived experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling genuinely heard, respected and represented• Building confidence, skills and independence• Developing social connections and belonging• Shifting from passive participant to active shaper• Joy, pride and enjoyment from true inclusion

“[IMAS has] helped me a lot with my confidence, because in everyday life I don’t have that confidence... it’s made me understand that I can do these things.”

– Dan, IMAS Trainer

The IMAS evidence base

Research into IMAS's co-production model shows that when it works well, it creates positive feedback loops: co-production produces environments and behaviours that make further co-production more natural and effective. The results include:

- Shifting perceptions of disability – in sports clubs, schools and healthcare settings
- Reframing priorities within healthcare through presentations by IMAS Trainers as 'experts by experience'
- Increased participation in Mixed Ability sport across communities
- Greater fairness and equity in sport and public life



How co-production works in Mixed Ability

IMAS's co-production model is built around four core values, each of which should inform how you work with IMAS and with disabled people more broadly when organising Mixed Ability events.



Growth, progress & change

Co-production must constantly evolve. Be prepared to reflect on structures and language, and adapt over time.



Social connections & relationships

Strong co-production is built on trust. Invest time in relationship-building before events – not just at delivery stage.



Empowering & building autonomy

Accessibility is central. Use Easy Read, BSL, rephrased wording and other adaptations so everyone can participate equally.



Challenging power hierarchies

Disabled participants are experts by experience. Events should actively flip power dynamics – they shape the agenda.

Good examples from IMAS in practice

The following examples show what co-production looks like in real Mixed Ability settings. These are not aspirational ideals – they are current practice.

Example 1: Co-Produced Training for Grassroots Sports Clubs

IMAS Trainers – all with lived experience of disability – co-produce and co-deliver training to grassroots sports clubs, SEND schools and healthcare professionals. Rather than a professional delivering to a passive audience, the Trainers are the experts in the room. Healthcare practitioners attend to learn from people with lived experience, not the other way around.

What this means for your event:

- Recruit people with lived experience to help design pre-event briefings for coaches, volunteers and officials
- Involve people with lived experience in delivering welcome and induction sessions on the day
- Ask people with lived experience to contribute to post-event feedback and review

Example 2: Healthcare Student Placements

IMAS hosts placements for student doctors, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and social workers. Students do not arrive to observe – they learn from IMAS Trainers as equals. People with lived experience co-produce projects with placement students, shifting the power dynamic that typically positions disabled people as passive recipients of care.

What this means for your event:

- If working with medical or care professionals as volunteers, ensure disabled participants are treated as the experts in their own experience
- Avoid framing disability support as a clinical task – frame it as a partnership

Example 3: Wellbeing Check-Ins as a Co-Production Tool

During the COVID-19 pandemic, IMAS Trainers collaboratively developed a 'wellbeing check-in' embedded at the start of every weekly meeting. This was both an output of co-production (developed through consultation) and a tool that enables further co-production by building trust and psychological safety.

What this means for your event:

- Build in check-in moments during planning meetings – ask how people are doing, not just what needs doing
- Create a culture where support needs can be raised freely and without judgement
- Create physical spaces for people to step out from the event, such as Quiet rooms/zones

Example 4: IMAS Trainers as Event Ambassadors

IMAS Trainers represent IMAS at discussion panels, information fairs, sports tasters and sector events. They do not attend as beneficiaries – they attend as spokespeople, advocates and change-makers. This has included events with senior public figures such as Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham, demonstrating the scale and credibility of the Mixed Ability movement.

What this means for your event:

- Invite people with lived experience to speak at your event launch, sponsor briefings or post-event celebration
- Include disabled co-producers in all public-facing communications and media
- Amplify their voices – not as a story about disability, but as a story about leadership
- Include people with lived experience as panellists in conferences or fringe and educational side events



Dos and Don'ts for Co-Produced Mixed Ability Events

These practical guidelines are drawn from IMAS's own experience and from the Disability Rights UK / Sport England co-production guide for sport and physical activity.

X DON'T	✓ DO
X Consult people only at certain stages – that's not co-production	✓ Involve people with lived experience from the very start, including in planning and design
X Assume you know what disabled participants need	✓ Listen equally to all voices; lived experience is essential insight
X Use jargon or inaccessible materials	✓ Provide information in plain language, Easy Read, sign language and other accessible formats
X Let professionals dominate decisions	✓ Share power – every voice has equal weight in decision-making
X Treat co-production as a tick-box exercise	✓ Embed it across all stages: planning, delivery and review
X Ignore support needs or accessibility barriers	✓ Identify and remove barriers from the outset – and ask what support is needed
X Expect people to contribute for free	✓ Compensate people fairly for their time, skills and expertise
X Set a rigid agenda or fixed outcomes	✓ Stay flexible; co-production can take unexpected, valuable directions

Quick Planning Checklist

Before your event, ask yourself:

<input type="checkbox"/> Have people with lived experience been involved in planning from the start?	<input type="checkbox"/> Are all materials available in accessible formats?
<input type="checkbox"/> Is there a budget to compensate co-producers for their time?	<input type="checkbox"/> Have accessibility needs been identified and planned for?
<input type="checkbox"/> Does the Project Team reflect a diversity of characteristics?	<input type="checkbox"/> Does everyone involved understand what co-production means and why it matters?
<input type="checkbox"/> Is there a plan for shared decision-making on the day?	<input type="checkbox"/> Are disabled participants involved in the review/evaluation after the event?
<input type="checkbox"/> Is the culture of your event genuinely welcoming, or just superficially inclusive?	

For more information visit mixedabilitysports.org or contact contact@mixedabilitysports.org

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