



MEAM Approach Communications Guide

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This guide is intended as a brief summary of some essential messages and things to remember when communicating about multiple disadvantage, MEAM and the MEAM Approach.

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This version: December 2022

Our unique approach

Across all MEAM communications we adopt a tone that reflects the principles underpinning our unique approach and we encourage MEAM Approach areas to do the same. These principles are:

- **Collaborative:** Tackling multiple disadvantage requires a collective and collaborative approach. As a coalition, we model the collaboration we want to see from local services and national government. We work closely with a wide range of local and national partners, while also valuing our independence and unique position. We are open, honest and reflective in everything we do.
- **Supportive and practical, yet ambitious:** We work with local areas and national policymakers who want to improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. We are ambitious about the change we want to see at individual, service, system and policy levels. At the same time, we recognise the constraints that people are working within and that things do not change overnight. We take a supportive and practical approach, starting where people are at while also encouraging them to be ambitious. Our work is both iterative and transformative.
- **Inclusive and guided by experience:** Our ultimate aim is to improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. We will ensure that this does not get lost among the necessary work on services and systems. We recognise that meaningful change must be based on a new balance of power between people with experience of multiple disadvantage, the people who support them, and the people who make decisions that affect them. We are committed to meaningfully coproducing our work and being guided by the views of everyone we work with. We use our unique position to bridge the gap between national and local policymakers and the experiences of services and individuals, ensuring that everyone benefits from each other's expertise.
- **Intersectional:** We take an intersectional approach to our work, recognising how people's social and political identities, and the discrimination linked to these, intersect to create unique experiences of multiple disadvantage.
- **Anti-racist:** We seek to understand how structural racism and white privilege impact on people's likelihood and experience of multiple disadvantage. We use our learning to challenge ourselves and others, and to change how services and systems respond. We take an actively anti-racist approach to all our work.

Talking about multiple disadvantage

Not everyone will be familiar with this term so below we provide some key messages you can use to explain multiple disadvantage and why this work is so important:

- People facing multiple disadvantage experience a combination of problems. For many, their current circumstances are shaped by long-term experiences of poverty, deprivation, trauma, abuse and neglect. Many also face racism, sexism and homophobia.
- These structural inequalities intersect in different ways, manifesting in a combination of experiences including homelessness, substance misuse, domestic violence, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health.
- Multiple disadvantage is a systemic, not an individual issue.
- People facing multiple disadvantage live in every area of the country.
- They are often failed by services and systems that focus on singular issues. This makes it harder for individuals to address their problems, lead fulfilling lives and contribute fully to their communities.
- This is a group that tends to be known to everyone, but often are served by no-one as they are perceived to be 'hard to reach', 'not engaging' or 'not my responsibility.' This can make services seem unhelpful and uncaring to someone experiencing multiple disadvantage who is seeking help, and decrease the likelihood of them seeking help in the future.

Remember:

When talking about MEAM and your local MEAM Approach work, please use the term "multiple disadvantage" rather than "complex needs".

This is because "multiple disadvantage" references the systemic barriers that people face, rather than seeing the people themselves as the problem.

Talking about MEAM and the MEAM Approach Network

Being clear and consistent in how you describe MEAM and the MEAM Approach is essential for ensuring people understand your work and offer their support and commitment. It is helpful to establish a narrative that tells a persuasive story about why it's important to tackle multiple disadvantage, and the reasons you are part of the MEAM Approach network.

- The Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) coalition is made up of the national charities Clinks, Collective Voice, Homeless Link and Mind. It was formed in 2009 to transform services, systems and policy for people facing multiple disadvantage.
- The MEAM vision is that everyone experiencing multiple disadvantage can reach their potential and contribute fully to their communities.
- The MEAM Approach is a framework to help local areas develop effective, coordinated services for people facing multiple disadvantage, and promote lasting, embedded change to local systems.
- Forty-two local areas across England are using the MEAM Approach. Together we form a network that is increasing individuals' wellbeing, reducing costs to public services and improving people's lives.
- We draw on our shared knowledge and practical experience to change systems, services and policy so that everyone experiencing multiple disadvantage can reach their potential and contribute fully to their communities.
- The MEAM Approach network is generously supported by the National Lottery Community Fund.
- A five-year longitudinal evaluation of the network provides evidence of the impact of the MEAM Approach on individuals, services and systems. The key findings are summarised on our [website](#) and at the front of the [evaluation report](#).

Remember:

Please contact MEAM before making any public statement about your MEAM Approach work.

You are welcome to use the [“Working as part of the MEAM Approach”](#) logo but please do not use the logos and branding of the MEAM coalition or its constituent partners.

Please mention the National Lottery Community Fund on any public statements.

Talking about your local work

Developing a clear and consistent brand for your work will support your plans to change local services and systems:

- You may want to consider a unique name for your programme of work.
- Agreeing a unique name can increase local buy in, consolidate the values of your partnership and help you promote your intervention. It can also illustrate clearly that you are not just creating another service but working to transform existing services and the wider system in which they operate.
- A clear name and brand can also help distinguish your local intervention from the MEAM Approach itself.
- For example, you may say “Lisbon’s Improving Access programme is based upon the MEAM Approach framework” or “Porto’s Total Support programme was developed using the MEAM Approach and Porto is a proud member of the national MEAM Approach network”. Current examples from the network include the ‘Counting Every Adult Team’ in Cambridgeshire, ‘Horden Together’ in Durham and ‘Surrey Adults Matter’ (SAM) in Surrey.

Remember:

In line with Memorandum of Understanding, please do not refer to your work as ‘MEAM’, the ‘MEAM service’, the ‘MEAM project’ or similar without a clear reference to your own locality.

Talking about policy

At MEAM, we recognise that changing local and national policy is an essential step for creating environments that can incentivise coordinated approaches and address the underlying factors that cause and perpetuate multiple disadvantage. Below we provide some general positions that can be referred to when engaging with policymakers:

- People facing multiple disadvantage should receive appropriate, flexible and personalised support to help them reach their potential and contribute fully to their communities. This support should be focused on people's strengths and recognise the trauma that many people have experienced. Local services should work together to develop and provide this support, focusing on the needs of individuals and not the needs of the system. (For more information about the support that people should receive and the 'key ingredients' of successful MEAM Approach work, please see our report [Reflections from the MEAM Approach network: Transforming services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage](#)).
- A siloed approach to policymaking and commissioning has created an environment in which it is more difficult than it should be for services to work together to address multiple disadvantage.
- In recent years there has been an increased focus on multiple disadvantage in many government departments and local commissioning teams. While this is welcome, the work is often directed from and focused within each silo, duplicating effort rather than promoting a coordinated approach.
- Government should develop a cross-departmental narrative and approach to multiple disadvantage, ensuring that funding, accountability and outcomes structures incentivise local areas to develop a coordinated and flexible response. The government's Changing Futures programme is exploring some of the work required for this change.
- The way that funding works has a significant impact on local service provision. For more information specifically in relation to funding, see our reports [Making funding work for people facing multiple disadvantage](#) and [Making funding work: Second report](#).
- The most powerful advocates for changing policy and practice around multiple disadvantage are people with lived experience of these issues and they should be central to all discussions with local and national policymakers and commissioners.

Remember:

The MEAM policy team can help you to consider and frame your work within the national policy landscape and discuss any local policy communications you would like to create.

Social media

Social media has become a key communication tool and offers a further opportunity to disseminate news about your partnership's work and the key messages you would like people to know about multiple disadvantage in your area.

Many councillors, MPs, journalists and other organisations are on Twitter so this can be a useful forum for sharing regular updates (as well as keeping an eye on what else is happening locally). Many community groups also operate through Facebook or, increasingly, LinkedIn and Nextdoor, so these may be other platforms to consider.

Some key pointers for social media include:

- Consider key messages and tone in your online communications – it's best to keep things short.
- Using images and videos can increase engagement.
- Communicate regularly on topics of interest to build follower numbers.
- Consider when you communicate – late on a Friday is less likely to be seen than Monday morning!
- Follow others to build up a network.
- Engage in debate but don't enter into arguments.
- Don't use twitter or other platforms as a way to engage with people you have not met, especially if the message is a difficult or complex one.
- We encourage you to interact with our MEAM coalition Twitter account and together we can build the presence of the MEAM Approach network. Please tag @MEAMcoalition and use the hashtag #multipledisadvantage

Remember:

All the advice and direction in this document applies to social media as well as to other written communications.

Further support on communications

We look forward to supporting you to communicate your work on tackling multiple disadvantage and your membership of the MEAM Approach network:

- For the 10 new areas, your Partnerships Development Managers can support you with the development of your own key messages and how to communicate your values and approach.
- If you would like to discuss the content of your communications, ask for comments on draft documents, or request help preparing for media interviews then please contact your MEAM area lead or email info@meam.org.uk.
- Our two resource libraries on [Mighty Networks](#) contain MEAM coalition materials and materials created by other local partnerships that are useful points of reference.
- Peers in the network, including long-term members, are always willing to provide advice and support.