

## Zoe Rowe, Social Innovation Consultant, Humanly

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ZOE ROWE specialises in human-centred design and behaviour change for tackling complex social issues. She is passionate about using insights to create and deliver innovative solutions. Zoe's experience spans academia, working on social and environmental issues, and work in the private sector as a global consumer insights expert. Zoe completed a PhD in Sustainable Behaviour Change and has had research papers published in the highly regarded Journal of Psychology and Marketing.

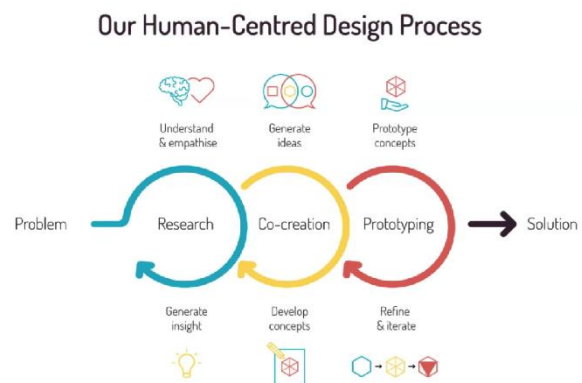
### 'Remote engagement: Removing barriers to inclusion in the context of COVID19.'

I am going to be talking about remote engagement and removing barriers to exclusion in relation to COVID19. Just a little bit about us at Humanly, we are design led project that focuses on human centred design and social impact. We work a lot with charities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government, always focused on social impact. With our

human-centred design process, ultimately, we start from the problem, go through iterations of research, co-creation and prototyping to find the solution that most meets the need of the people we are designing for. We co-

wrote a paper with the Centre for Ageing Better, who are a charity focused on aging, *Remote engagement: Removing barriers to inclusion in the context of COVID19* (2021). We identified seven themes that people need to think about when planning remote engagement activities, and what we have learnt during our research in lockdown. The first is breaking down barriers to digital engagement. It is helpful to offer one-to-one training in advance of calls, especially for using things like Miro or Mural, giving people a safe space to practice these things. Also allowing additional time prior to workshop, 20-30 minutes to let them get comfortable with different digital tools you may be using. Ensuring that one-to-one support is available during the session, for example, a phone number if people get lost.

We then looked at alternative methods for user engagement activities. There are many ways to carry out user engagement aside from one-to-one calls or group things online. We created some postal kits which allowed participants to complete them in their own time, they were sent



to them. We allowed them to capture diary logs in their own time, there is a case study of this in our paper which I can share a link to. Examples could be card sorting and social networking mapping. Card sorting can be done in an interactive environment, like Google Slides or on a digital whiteboard. Other things can be used to capture someone's journey through a service, you can do this other the phone and then map it onto the spreadsheet and then onto a digital whiteboard. Feedback on ideas can be done using surveys using things like concept sketches, story boards and videos to bring the idea to life.

Consider the person's living environment and any barriers they may face. It might sound obvious, but the best time of day for activities, especially for carers, minors or other family members, or other people. Some people might be more comfortable with cameras off in a group call, or even prefer to dial in, rather than use their computer. Creating a rapport remotely might be harder, so factor that into planning, taking a lot more time to build relationships prior to an event. Then really consider how you might need to adapt language and literacy, so where people have additional communication needs, keep language super simple, using picture cards can work well. For longer engagement pieces, letting participants complete these ahead of time can really allow for more individual reflection, and help mitigate any pressure for having to provide an instant answer. If you are running sessions online, really consider creating shorter sessions, this helps people stay focuses, we have all had Zoom fatigue over the last year. Also consider your timings, allowing them to join in and around other life commitments.

Then we come to weighing up whether one-to-one versus group engagement is more suitable. One-to-one activities have the benefit of ensuring you hear the individual's voices and opinions, but group environment can encourage conversation, and help spark ideas to really broaden peoples thinking. Group conversations and activities can be facilitated online, you can do this via Facebook or WhatsApp groups, online forum for discussions, and group video calls can work well. It can be more difficult to recruit people remotely, that is quite common. You cannot drop into existing groups or turn up at a local area, so utilising other organisations and their networks for getting people involved is so valuable. We have used social media, local community groups, membership organisations and networks to help recruit participants. I already mentioned our example of giving people a task to complete beforehand, this can really help to focus engagement and make interactions more productive. Other things can be a task before a meeting or give people a question to think about ahead of time. This means people are more likely to understand the purpose of the activity and what you are hoping to achieve in the session.

Finally, looking forward at what we can learn from the pandemic? Quite a lot. We will be changing the way we work from what we have

learnt. So, first is interacting differently, allowing for more open relaxed conversations. Creating hands on activities, these have been so valuable for getting a more creative response. Digital diaries, we have had a lot longer engagement and observation periods than if we were doing a face-to-face observation. Undertaking engagement with the same group over a sustained period of time, this has helped develop a sense of community remotely. Also, checking participants preferences rather than make assumptions. This has helped us create more meaningful and ongoing engagement and adapting the different tools and methods we have been using for the individual, especially thinking about digital literacy. Investing in digital skills training to support people over a sustained period can have a huge pay off in the short and long term. There is a lot more bulk and case studies in our paper, so we would really welcome you to go and have a look.

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