

# PP: ETHICS & DEI (DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION)

## Older people's evaluation panel for development of digital and technology

The Union for Senior Services, VALLI

**Purpose** During recent years and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Finnish society, with its varied services, has digitized rapidly. At the same time, the use of technological solutions, for example, in healthcare or elderly care has increased. As a result, many people from different backgrounds, especially older people, find it difficult to use digital and technological services and equipment, as the solutions face many problems in terms of accessibility and utility, among other challenges. This is a challenge not only for the end-users, for example, older people, but also for product developers and companies, if no one is using the service or the product. It is also a challenge to society and the public services, because of the trend of transferring services to the Internet and reducing traditional services. The solution is user-oriented development. User-oriented development means making sure that services and products that are developed are inclusive and people find it beneficial to use and purchase them. User-oriented development offers new knowledge and understanding to digital and technology developers, as there is diversity among the population, as well as the older population. For example, all the factors of geographical area of residence, wealth, cognitive and physical skills, education level, digital skills, individual's safety net, mode of living, being included in one or more marginalized group, previous working life and professional, affect the use of digital services and technological equipment. **Method** The Union for Senior Services, VALLI, has developed a forum where older people can participate in the development processes of digital and technological services and products. Older people test and evaluate the service or product in the making. They give different perspectives and ideas and explain their needs to the developers so that the developers can fix the service/product. VALLI coordinates this nationwide network for older people. Older people can be involved when they want and choose the method of involvement: they can participate in events and visits, answer questionnaires, and give interviews. The panel is a meeting point for the older people and the developers. In other means, as the developers might not have resources to seek older people for testing and evaluation events, they can contact the coordinator who can contact older people. After each testing or evaluation event (approximately 25 events per year), older people are asked to fill out the questionnaire about the specific event. In addition, the coordinator uses observation for evaluating older people's participation. Yearly, the older people fill out the wider surveys about their experience of digital inclusiveness. **Results and Discussion** According to different evaluation methods and data, older people's experience of digital inclusion in 2023 has increased due to their Panel activity (n=130). Older people also estimated that they were able to influence in the development process of digital services and products (4,1 on the Likert scale). When participating in user-oriented development processes, older people learn more about the possibilities of digitalization and technology. Their own rate of use is more likely to increase and their fears and prejudices against technology decrease. With the help of the evaluation panel, digital services or technological products are more accessible and appropriate, and in the long term they are more likely to be purchased. The developers' understanding of the different needs of the elderly is increasing, which helps them with their innovation and development process. The developers are more likely to produce products and services which are purchased. As there are both national (Finnish Government, 2022) and international, especially EU-level, (European Commission) policies to increase citizens' digital inclusion when increasing the level of digitalization, the evaluation panel is one method to support these policies.

### References

Finnish Government (2022): *Digital Compass*. Publications of the Finnish Government 2022:72. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-906-9>

European Commission. Policies: Digital Inclusion. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-inclusion>

**Keywords:** digital inclusion, older people, user-oriented development

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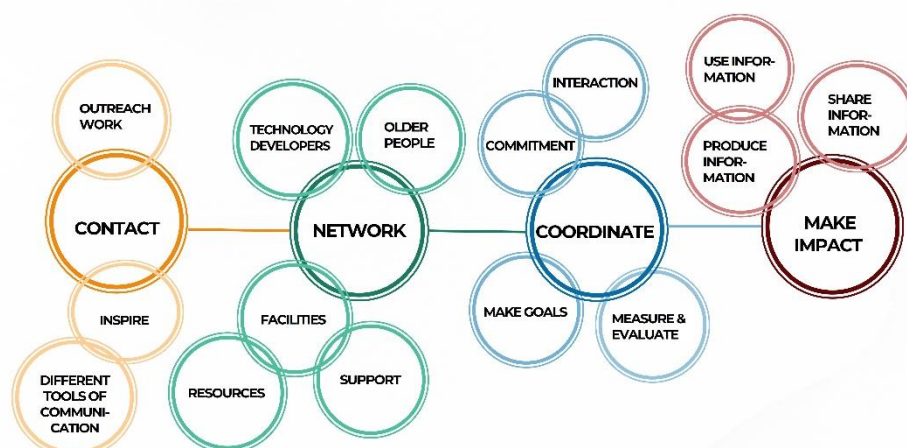


Figure 1. The concept and process of the Older people's evaluation panel