



A MILE IN THEIR SHOES

BUILDING INCLUSIVE RESEARCH COMMUNITIES:
A GUIDE FOR ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) is a vital aspect of research, where individuals with relevant, often lived, experience contribute to the design, implementation, and dissemination of research. This collaborative approach leads to high-quality and impactful research, as it is designed in partnership with the very individuals it aims to understand and help. However, identifying suitable participants for involvement can be challenging. This is where Community Champions play a crucial role!

Community Champions are known by many different names: Community Connectors, Community Leaders, Community Researchers, Peer Researchers to name just a few. They may be paid charity workers, faith leaders, community group organisers, or volunteers. They are trusted members of their community and possess valuable knowledge of the community, including its people, spaces, and language. Understanding their role and how to effectively collaborate with them is essential for successful PPI.



We spoke with a group of Community Champions about their role and working with researchers. Click the links below to hear some audio clips of the discussion:

- ||| [What are researchers asking of Community Champions? And what skills and contacts do they need to fulfil those asks?](#)
- ||| [What barriers and challenges do Community Champions face when working with researchers?](#)
- ||| [Who or what can help overcome the barriers and challenges?](#)

From these discussions we've compiled a quick best practice guide.

Some important things to know about Community Champions before you start:

- Community Champions often balance multiple responsibilities.
- They may be paid workers, but they also might be working voluntarily for their community, whilst balancing paid work.
- Community Champions are often delighted to be of help to researchers, they want the voices of their community to be heard!
- Community Champions are trusted members of their community, so they want the opportunities and offers they bring to their community to be worthwhile and beneficial to them.
- Getting the right group together for a research project can take a Community Champion a lot of time and effort! It may involve many phone calls, reminder phone calls, and giving people lifts to the meeting.

Things to think about while in the planning stages:

- The relationship, trust and rapport with your Community Champion will be key, so start building connections with them as soon as you can, even if you don't know exactly what you need yet.
- Be transparent and honest about what you're researching, what the benefit will be to their community for taking part, and what you need from the Community Champion. Be honest about what you don't know yet, that's okay too!
- Timing: ask your community champion how long they need to get a group together for you - it might be longer than you think!
- Flexibility: you may need to have more meetings than initially planned as it may not be possible to get all the people you need in one place at the same time.
- Budget: plan in reimbursement/payment for your Community Champions to acknowledge the time, skill, effort, and costs involved for them.
- Compensation for your participants: also plan in your budget to pay, or give vouchers to your participants, for their time and expertise. This helps show that you value their time and what they have to say.
- Plain language documents: where you can streamline the documents you need Community Champions and participants to read and write them in plain language. Factor in reading time and time for questions about these documents.
- Language needs: check with your Community Champion if their community needs literature/consent forms etc in another language.
- Communication: keep your Community Champion updated about where you're up to and of any changes in the project.

Meeting the community group, things to check with your Community Champion:

- Venue: where will their community feel most comfortable meeting? If people feel comfortable and safe, they are more likely to talk and share their experiences with you.
- Time: what time of day would be best? This might not be in office hours!
- Food: when providing refreshments - what type of food would be best? Our Community Champions told us providing culturally appropriate food helps people feel comfortable and open up.
- Translation: do you need a translator with you? Communities will often share more if they're able to express themselves in their first language. If you need a translator, budget for their time too.
- Cultural sensitivities: are there any cultural sensitivities that you need to be aware of? Be aware there are many cultures within 'one' community and also across generations. For example, there may be topics that younger generations are happy to talk about that are taboo for older generations.

Once you've completed the research:

- Share your findings: once the research is complete, take it back to the community. It is empowering for them to hear how their participation and voice has had an impact and it encourages people to take part in research again!



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