Developing training and support for public involvement in research

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A common question we get asked at INVOLVE is: “Where can I access training for public involvement?” Sometimes, this is a researcher or member of the public wanting to develop their skills or knowledge. But often it’s a researcher or public involvement manager wanting to offer training to other people – either to researchers across their ‘patch’ or to members of the public getting involved in their research / organisation.

While it is great that people recognise the value of developing knowledge and skills around involvement, unfortunately the answer to this question is not always what they would like to hear. This is because:

- at present there are few open-access training opportunities for public involvement – most courses or learning events are internal to a particular organisation or integrated into individual research projects
- the evidence from people’s experience is that the best approach is to tailor training and support to each individual situation – suggesting that accessing a generic or off-the-shelf course may not be the best approach.

Therefore, our advice is to offer training and support tailored to the situation and matched to the needs of the individuals involved. So the next question is: “How can I find out how to offer good quality training and support?”

Now we can help! We have been working on a new resource to provide information and guidance to people planning training and support packages. All the information in the new resource is grounded in real life experiences, drawn from the knowledge of members of the public, researchers, trainers and public involvement specialists.

The resource includes our definitions of the terms ‘training’ and ‘support’ and some guiding principles to inform any approach. We give an overview of training and support for researchers and members of the public, look at carrying out a needs assessment and then look in detail at five common involvement roles. Throughout the resource we include short case studies to give examples of how these ideas have been put into practice. These examples include one-day workshops, Master’s level modules, how training has been integrated into involvement, how to assess training needs and, importantly, a wide range of approaches for supporting researchers and members of the public once involvement is underway. To whet your appetite, two of these examples are highlighted here.

Case study: Raising awareness of public involvement with researchers

This one-day workshop was designed to target early career researchers undertaking their PhD. The content for the workshop was designed by a collaborative group including National Institute for Health Research patient and public involvement managers, PhD students and a member of the public. The workshop aimed to meet the needs of researchers by

demonstrating how public involvement could contribute to the conduct of their research and help them fulfil the expectations of funders and sponsors, and by identifying a range of resources and practical approaches to developing involvement in their own projects. An innovative aspect of this workshop was using postcards to complete short action plans and mailing them back to participants three months later to remind them of their ideas.

www.invo.org.uk/resource-centre/training-resource/

Case study: Preparing for involvement with the Patient Learning Journey Model

Before people with experience of pressure ulcers started contributing to research at the Leeds Clinical Trial Unit, the Patient and Public Involvement Officer, Delia Muir, brought them together for facilitated workshops. The aim was to prepare them for involvement in research. However, instead of focusing on research, this workshop focused on helping people to understand the value of their personal experience, expertise and skills and how this can contribute to research. The participants worked to identify learning points from their personal experiences and how to communicate these to others. They were also helped to think about how much of their personal experiences they were willing to disclose when working with a research team. As Delia explains in the case study, this approach is valuable as it starts with people and their stories, rather than the other things they need to know.

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To explore the whole training and support resource go to www.invo.org.uk/resourcecentre/training-resource/

We would like to thank everyone who has contributed their knowledge and experience to this project – they are all listed

in the ‘About this resource’ section on the website.