

Being a member of a commissioning board

Guidelines for members of the public

Introduction

This is one of a series of seven guidelines produced by INVOLVE providing information about public involvement in research commissioning. For a list of the guidelines available, see the back cover.

This guideline is written for members of the public interested in being a member of a commissioning board.

Numbers in brackets [] are text notes and give additional information, see section 8, page 8.

Words in **green bold** are explained in the Glossary in section 9, page 8.

If you would like to comment on anything included in this guideline or require further information, please get in touch with INVOLVE.

INVOLVE is a national advisory group funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). We aim to promote public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research.

We produce a range of publications, including all the guidelines in this series, which are free and can be ordered or downloaded from our website www.invo.org.uk. Please contact INVOLVE if you would like any of our publications sent to you - see the back cover for contact details. We also have a research database on our website, with examples of public involvement in research.

If you need a copy of this guideline in another format please contact us.

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1. What is a commissioning board?

A commissioning board is a group of people who oversee the **commissioning** process. It is made up of research funders, researchers, health and/or social care professionals and often includes people who use services and carers. The key role of a commissioning board is to assess **research grant applications** [1] that have been submitted and ensure that those selected for funding are relevant and of high quality.

Most commissioning boards will have 'terms of reference' which will give information on what the board is set up to do and how it will run. You should be sent this information from the commissioner, who is the person (or organisation) who asks for the research to be carried out. Discussion will take place at the meetings and a decision made on which **research** to fund. There may not always be agreement amongst members about which research to fund.

While the members of the commissioning board use their own expert knowledge to assess the **research proposals**, they also rely upon other 'experts' (**peer reviewers**) [2] to provide written opinions about the research proposals.

2. Why should I be interested in getting involved?

By getting involved on a commissioning board you can help to ensure that research is relevant and important to the people or services that the research will affect. As a **member of the public** you may be able to offer the following contributions to a commissioning board:

- knowledge and experience of a particular condition or service
- a public perspective
- experience of being a research participant.

More specifically, you may be able to:

- identify priority topic areas and the important research questions from a public perspective
- advise on the appropriateness of the public **involvement** proposed in research grant applications.

“ It is hard to say what difference my involvement has made. I think that just by being there and being labelled as 'the consumer' or 'the lay member' you can remind people what they are primarily there for - to benefit people who use the NHS - not to benefit anyone's research career. I think I have been able to influence discussion (although I'm not sure I've influenced decision making). I have also tried to influence the way the programme as a whole tries to involve the public. ”

(Member of the public)

Commissioners and other reviewers may not have the experience and knowledge that members of the public can bring and therefore your input is especially valued.

The benefits for you personally may include:

- influencing what research is funded
- opportunities for personal development including learning new skills
- getting involved in interesting work and increasing your knowledge about a topic.

The comments commissioning board members make will help the commissioners in their decision about which research grant applications to fund.



3. How do I become a member of a commissioning board?

If you are interested in being a member of a commissioning board then you could contact the research commissioners or funders. Some research commissioners and funders commission a range of topics e.g. the **Social Care Institute for Excellence** www.scie.org.uk, others will commission research in a specific area e.g. Alzheimer's Society or Asthma UK.

If you are interested in getting involved with the Research Programmes funded by the **National Institute for Health Research**, contact details can be found on their website www.nihr.ac.uk - see Programmes.

4. What do I need to know?

As a member of the public you can help bring a public perspective to the discussions and decisions made at meetings. Commissioners will value your experience to broaden the knowledge of the board.

You will probably be asked to complete a form giving your contact details and research interests or to send a **curriculum vitae** (CV). Some commissioners have a job description giving details of what is required and a person specification giving information on the sort of skills and experience they would like members of the public to have.

The National Institute for Health Research Health Technology Assessment Programme has a job description for service user panel members which outlines the main duties and sets out the attributes and experience needed by a service user panel member:

- previous committee experience
- a willingness to familiarise yourself with medical/research language
- an understanding of what having a public perspective means
- good communication skills; ability to listen to others and express own views in discussion.

www.hta.ac.uk

5. How will I be involved?

5.1 What information will I be sent before the meeting?

You will generally be sent all the research proposals and the comments from the peer reviewers. You may either be asked to read them all, or read some in greater detail. The papers are most likely to be sent electronically but you can ask to have them sent by post. If you need information in a specific format please ask in advance.

5.2 Will there be 'plain English' summaries of the information?

A 'plain English' summary summarises the research proposal. Technical vocabulary should be explained and it should avoid jargon. Some commissioners request that researchers submit a 'plain English' summary as part of their research grant application.

“ There has been lots of jargon. But I find that if I say I don't understand something, there are often other members who then say they don't either. ”
(Member of the public)

5.3 How long does it take to prepare for a meeting?

You will generally have to spend at least half a day reading through the research proposals and background papers before the meeting.

5.4 What will I have to do at the meeting?

You will be asked to attend a meeting or a series of meetings depending on the terms of reference of the commissioning board.

At the meeting/s you will be expected to:

- listen to the views of others
- contribute to the discussions, ensuring that the perspectives and priorities of members of the public are voiced and taken into account
- make judgements about the quality of public involvement in the proposals
- vote on, or rank, the research proposals.

Some boards invite the grant applicants to come along and present their proposals.

In order to help with participating at the meeting it may be useful to have contact with user/consumer groups to be aware of broader user issues.

“ Most often my participation is about being an outside eye who is able to ask the basic questions. They are not 'simple' questions. They are the core and point of research: But why are we doing this? What will it mean to patients? Will services change? ”
(Member of the public)

5.5 Will I be the only member of the public at the meeting?

Most commissioners have two or three members of the public on their commissioning boards.

5.6 What happens if I cannot attend the meeting?

Commissioners will understand that sometimes people will not be able to attend all the meetings. If you cannot attend it is important that you let the commissioner know. There may be a process through which you can feed your views into the meeting, for example by giving your responses over the phone or by email prior to the meeting.

5.7 What about confidentiality?

The research proposals you will be discussing at the meeting are confidential documents. The discussions about each research proposal that take place at the meeting will also be confidential. However, the decision whether or not to fund the research will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. You will be asked not to tell others about the outcomes of the discussions until after they are officially announced. The commissioners will provide you with information about confidentiality, including what to do with the papers after the meeting.

5.8 What should I do if I think I may have an interest that would influence or affect the way I comment on the research proposals at the meeting?

You may have a conflict of interest when discussing a particular research proposal at the meeting. For example, you may have personal or professional ties to the researchers, financial interests in the research, or strongly held personal, political or religious beliefs relating to the research being considered.

You should be asked to declare any potential conflicts of interest. You may be asked to leave the room when any applications are discussed where you have declared an interest. If you think that you might have a conflict of interest it may be helpful to discuss this with the commissioners before the meeting.

5.9 What will happen after the meeting?

You will be notified of the decisions made at the meetings. There may be minutes of what was discussed at the meeting and what decisions have been made.

5.10 How long will my involvement on a commissioning board be?

This will vary depending on the terms of reference of the commissioning board. Some commissioning boards involve people for a number of years and others will meet only once or just a few times over a short period of time.

“ The consumer members of the Quality Research in Dementia Network are usually appointed for three years on all activities. Members of commissioning boards are appointed for varying amounts of time. Dates of meetings are advertised well in advance and volunteers sought on a ‘rotational basis.’ ”
(Member of the public)

6. Will I be paid?

Some organisations, such as NHS Trusts, Primary Care Trusts and voluntary organisations, are not able to offer payment or may offer different amounts.

Guidance that has been agreed with the Department of Health for the National Institute for Health Research Programmes on payment to the public is as follows [3]:

For attendance at and preparation for a committee meeting (e.g. a commissioning board, advisory group or panel meeting) a daily rate of **£150.00** is offered **provided the person is not in receipt of a full time salary from public funds.**

Most commissioners will reimburse travel, subsistence, childcare and carer costs.

Payment for involvement in research can be complicated. It can affect your entitlement to Social Security benefits or change your tax position. If you are offered payment it is important that you check what effect this might have on your financial situation. It is always worth getting further information on this [4, 5, 6].

7. Where can I get further support and training?

The commissioner may provide training and support. This may be in the form of an induction day or offering you a **mentor**. A mentor will have experience of being on a commissioning board and will be able to answer your questions. You can sit next to them at the meeting so that you can ask questions while the meeting is going on. A member of the commissioning programme may offer to talk about the process before the meeting. You may also find it useful to talk to another member of the public.

Talk to the commissioner to find out exactly what opportunities there are.



The **National Forensic Mental Health Research and Development Programme** has produced a 'User Involvement Induction Pack.' This gives information about its advisory committee and also some things you should consider if you are asked to become a member.
www.nfmhp.org.uk/user.htm

8. Key reference and text notes

All INVOLVE publications are available on our website www.invo.org.uk.

Key reference

For more information about active public involvement in all aspects of the research process see:

Royle J, Steel R, Hanley B, Bradburn J. (2001) Getting involved in research: a guide for consumers. INVOLVE. (**Note:** this is being rewritten and will be replaced by an information pack in January 2007.)

The information for this guideline has been drawn from: INVOLVE (2003) Report of commissioning workshop. INVOLVE.

Text notes

1. See INVOLVE's guideline for members of the public on 'Getting involved in research grant applications.' www.invo.org.uk
2. See INVOLVE's guideline for members of the public on 'Peer reviewing research proposals.' www.invo.org.uk
3. INVOLVE. (2006) Guidance that has been agreed with the Department of Health on payments rates to members of the public for attendance at committee meetings and carrying out peer review. INVOLVE.
4. For more detailed information about payment and the impact it may have on benefits and taxation see Steel R. (2006) A guide to paying members of the public actively involved in research. INVOLVE.
5. Department of Health. (2006) Reward and Recognition: The principles and practice of service user payment and reimbursement in health and social care. A guide for service providers, service users and carers. Department of Health. www.dh.gov.uk - see Publications and Statistics.
6. Turner M and Beresford P. (2005) Contributing on equal terms: service user involvement and the benefits system. Social Care Institute for Excellence www.scie.org.uk - see SCIE's Resources and Publications.

9. Glossary

This glossary provides brief explanations of terms in **green bold** in the text of this guideline and information about the National Institute for Health Research programmes.

Commissioning

Commissioning usually involves:

- identifying funding for a piece of research

- preparing a research brief
- advertising the research topic
- selecting a shortlist of researchers who apply to undertake the research
- arranging for proposals to be peer reviewed
- making a decision about which researchers are going to be awarded the funding
- agreeing a contract.

Curriculum vitae (CV)

A curriculum vitae is an outline of a person's educational and professional history, experience relevant to the job applied for and relevant skills; it is usually prepared for job applications. CVs that are part of research applications will ask the applicants for their experience, knowledge and relevant skills.

Health Technology Assessment (HTA) programme

This is one of the programmes funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The purpose of the HTA programme is to ensure that high-quality research information on the costs, effectiveness and broader impact of health technologies is produced in the most effective way for those who use, manage and provide care in the NHS. www.hta.ac.uk

Involvement

Involvement in research refers to **active** involvement between people who use services, carers and researchers, rather than the use of people as participants in research (or as research 'subjects'). Many people describe involvement as doing research **with** or **by** people who use services rather than **to**, **about** or **for** them.

Members of the public (or public)

INVOLVE uses this term to cover:

- patients and potential patients
- people who use health and social services
- informal (unpaid) carers
- parents/guardians
- disabled people
- members of the public who are potential recipients of health promotion programmes, public health programmes, and social service interventions
- groups asking for research because they believe they have been exposed to potentially harmful substances or products (e.g. pesticides or asbestos)
- organisations that represent people who use services.

Other organisations have different definitions of this term.

Mentor

A mentor is a person willing to share their experience, knowledge and wisdom to help, guide and support someone who is less experienced. Mentors act as friends, teachers and advisers. A person who is newly involved in research can ask for a mentor to help them adjust to their new role.

National Forensic Mental Health R&D Programme

This is one of the programmes funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The programme funds research which supports the provision of mental health services for people with mental disorders who are offenders or at risk of offending.

National Institute for Health Research

In 'Best Research for Best Health: a new national health research strategy 2006', the Department of Health established the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) to oversee the direction for publicly funded health research in England. www.nihr.ac.uk

National Institute for Health Research Central Commissioning Facility (CCF)

The Central Commissioning Facility (CCF) was set up in 2006 to manage and administer the NHS National Research and Development (R&D) Programme. The national NHS R&D programme investigates a range of healthcare matters and assists how research-based knowledge is applied across all healthcare sectors. www.nihr-ccf.org.uk

The programmes administered by the CCF are:

- **Research for Patient Benefit (RfPB)**

This programme has three deadlines a year with the aim of commissioning research to improve the day to day practices of the NHS staff.

- **Research for Innovation, Speculation and Creativity (RISC)**

These awards are intended particularly for speculative, novel proposals that are likely to have a low chance of success but a potential for high impact.

- **Research Centres**

A call has been issued for applications for support from institutions recognised for their world class biomedical research. Support will be for 3-5 years.

- **Programme grants**

There will be a bi-annual call for applications outlining 3-5 year programmes of work with a maximum budget of £2 million.

- **Invention for Innovation**

This fund is for innovative research in the area of medical technologies and devices. This new programme will incorporate two existing programmes, New and Emerging Applications of Technology (NEAT) and Health Technology Devices (HTD) and will be combined with the new challenge fund.

- **Policy Research Programme**

The Policy Research Programme commissions research to support a wide range of policy development and evaluation in health, public health and social care.

Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme

This is one of the programmes funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The SDO programme was established to consolidate and develop the evidence base on the organisation, management and delivery of healthcare services to increase the quality of patient care, ensure better patient outcomes and contribute to improved population health. www.sdo.lshtm.ac.uk

Peer review/Refereeing

Peer reviewing is where a research proposal or a report of research is read and commented on by people with similar interests and expertise to those who wrote the proposal or report. Peer reviewers might be members of the public, researchers, or other professionals. Peer review helps to check the quality of a report or research proposal. Members of the public who act as peer reviewers may choose to comment on:

- Whether the research addresses an important and relevant question
- The methods used by researchers
- The quality of public involvement in the research.

Research

The term research means different things to different people, but is essentially about finding out new knowledge that could lead to changes to treatments, policies or care. The definition used by the Department of Health is: 'The attempt to derive generalisable new knowledge by addressing clearly defined questions with systematic and rigorous methods.'

Definition from: Alzheimer's Society/Quality Research in Dementia (QRD).

Research grant

Research grants are given to enable researchers to carry out a particular piece of research. They might amount to millions of pounds for a major study about genetics for example, or a few hundred pounds for a local study about people's experience of using a particular service. Usually, in order to get research grants, researchers have to write a research proposal and receive a positive peer review.

Research proposal

This is usually an application form or set of papers that researchers have to complete to say what research they want to do and how they want to do it. It will also cover the aim of the research, what the research questions are, who will be involved (both as participants and in carrying out the research), the timescale and the cost.

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

SCIE's aim is to improve the experience of people who use care by developing and promoting knowledge about good practice in the sector. Using knowledge gathered from diverse sources and a broad range of people and organisations, SCIE develop resources which they share freely, supporting those working in social care and empowering service users. www.scie.org.uk

10. Acknowledgements

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INVOLVE

Support Unit

Wessex House
Upper Market Street
Eastleigh
Hampshire SO50 9FD

Telephone: 02380 651088
Textphone: 02380 626239
E-mail: admin@invo.org.uk
Website: www.invo.org.uk

The guidelines in this series are:

- P1 Getting involved in research grant applications: Guidelines for members of the public**
 - P2 Peer reviewing research proposals: Guidelines for members of the public**
 - P3 Being a member of a commissioning board: Guidelines for members of the public**
 - C1 Public involvement in research grant applications: Guidelines for commissioners**
 - C2 Public involvement in peer reviewing research proposals: Guidelines for commissioners**
 - C3 Public involvement on commissioning boards: Guidelines for commissioners**
 - R1 Public involvement in research grant applications: Guidelines for researchers**
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