

Getting involved in research grant applications

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 getting involved in research grant applications.

Numbers in brackets [] refer to text notes and give additional information, see section 9, page 8. Words in **green bold** are explained in the Jargon Buster in section 10, page 9.

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 research grant application?

A research grant application is the stage of the **commissioning** process of applying for money to do **research**. The applicant usually needs to provide specific information including a description of the research (a **research proposal**); who will be doing it (the research team) and a detailed estimate of how much the research may cost.

Most research **commissioners** provide a detailed grant application pack which will include an explanation of the research funding available, how applications will be judged and the closing date for applications.

The application pack will usually have a number of forms to fill in and ask for other background information with some guidance notes about what is needed. You may have to provide a brief **curriculum vitae** (CV) and personal details. Depending on your level of involvement you may be asked to help gather this information.

2. Why should I get involved in a research grant application?

Perhaps you have been asked to get involved in a grant application by a commissioner or a researcher or perhaps you have had an idea about some research that needs to be done. Either way this is a chance to get involved at an early stage of the research process.

By getting involved, you can help:

- shape the focus and direction of exactly what will be researched
- plan how the research will be carried out
- plan the best ways to publicise the findings of the research [1].

You can help with a research grant application by providing:

- knowledge and experience of a particular condition or service relevant to the research topic
- a public perspective
- views about the best ways to involve others in research.

The benefits for you personally may include:

- having your opinions heard
- sharing your experiences of health and social care services
- opportunities for personal development including learning new skills.

The downside is that many applications, no matter how good, are refused funding which can be frustrating and disappointing. However, whether the application is awarded funding or not, you are helping to establish a framework for future public **involvement** in other grant applications.

3. How do I get involved?

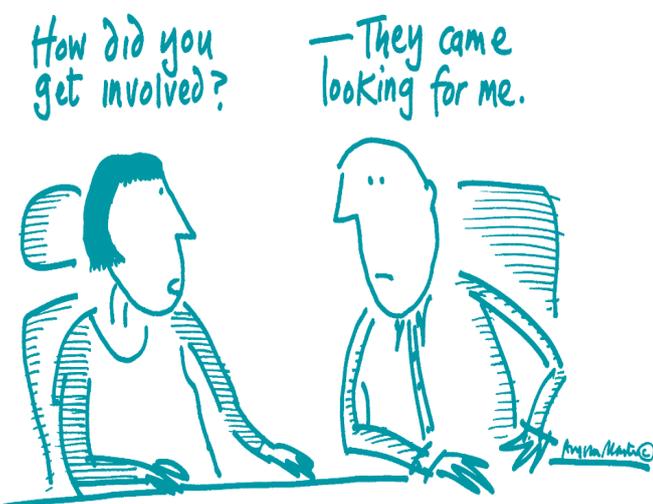
How people have got involved in research grant applications shows that it often depends on being in the right place at the right time! [2]

If you are already a member of a local group

This can be a good first step as many people have said that they first got involved in a research grant application through their links with a local support group or membership of a voluntary organisation.

People have explained that a researcher or commissioner contacted the group they belonged to and asked members to get involved in writing a research grant application.

Others have said that their organisation decided that they should do some research themselves [3].



If you are not a member of any group

Of course you may not be a member of any organisation and still get involved in a research grant application.

The ways this usually happens includes being contacted directly, for example, by a local researcher. Some people decide to 'go it alone' (3), others have got involved by replying to an advert in the local or national media or through a website.

“ We found our service users by a variety of means - word of mouth, by contacting relevant charities and organisations - sometimes people just contact you and it is hard to know how they found out about possible involvement. ”
(Research commissioner)

4. What ways will I be involved?

It is important to be clear about how you will be getting involved. There are three main ways that **members of the public** can get involved: through consultation, collaboration and user-led or user controlled research. [2]

Consultation - involves being asked for your views about research. The researcher wants to understand your opinions and views about the research before completing the grant application. You may be asked to come to a public meeting, attend a smaller discussion group or meet with the researchers. You will not usually be involved in the writing of the research grant application although there may be opportunities to get further involved in the research if the application is funded.

Collaboration - this is a more active partnership working with researchers on a grant application. You may be asked to comment on drafts and/or write a 'plain English' summary. You may be involved in writing some sections of the application form.

This approach can involve a considerable amount of your time and commitment within a tight timescale. The researcher will usually take the lead in ensuring the application is completed.



- The Alzheimer's Society Quality Research in Dementia awarded a research grant to carers of people with dementia as co-applicants with an academic unit. Their personal experience of caring for people with dementia ensured they included questions they felt were important, but which the researchers had not thought mattered [2].
- The TRUE project (a research project on training in research for service users) was a three-way collaboration between academic and NHS researchers and mental health service users. However, the service users were not involved at the grant application stage. One of the service user team members commented 'if given the chance to do it (the research) again I would want to be involved in the bid itself. I would want to be involved in the design of the project. I would want more information about the background of the people I would be working with and the organisations. I would (with my peers) want to hold more of the power' [4].

User-led or user-controlled research - this is when you as an individual, or as a member of a community or voluntary organisation, choose or are asked by commissioners or researchers to take the lead role in completing a research grant application. You decide on the approach to the issues and questions to be looked at in the grant application, as well as the way the research will be carried out if funded. Researchers may still be involved, providing advice and support on the planning of the research, but will not be in control of the application.

The Big Lottery, for example, make research grants to organisations that are not run to make a profit and are community led. Research projects without user involvement will not be funded.
www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

A group of people with learning difficulties were commissioned by the Department of Health to research user involvement in 12 research projects. In their report they talk about being researchers, running the project, managing the money, making all the decisions and helping to bring about changes [5].

5. What do I need to know?

Before you decide to get involved it is worth going through all the information you are given about the research. This information will be provided by the commissioner and/or researcher - depending on who you have already had contact with - and they should take time to discuss this and to answer your questions. The information should give you a clear idea about:

- why the research is needed
- an explanation of what will need to be done to complete the grant application
- opportunities for involvement
- what skills and experience are needed
- suggested timescale.

The information may also describe what practical support may be provided, for example:

- **personal opportunities** (flexible arrangements, developing skills)
- **research and management support** (time to talk through difficulties and issues that may arise)
- **payment** (travel, other expenses and financial payments for your involvement)
- **contact details** of researchers and others involved in the grant application.

This information should be easy to read and understand. If it is not, ask the commissioners or researchers to provide clearer explanations. Let them know what format you find easiest to use - for example, large print, CD-Rom, verbal explanations, presentations or discussions.

“ I would have liked a proper job specification, really setting out what skills I would need. I could then have skilled up before I started. This is an important issue as so often users are employed just because they are users, with no thought given to the required abilities. ”
(Member of the public)

6. Will I be paid?

If you are being consulted on a research grant application you can usually expect payment of travel and other expenses (e.g. child care or carer costs). Expenses may not be offered and you may have to ask. You may also be paid an attendance fee to cover your time.

If you are collaborating or leading the application sometimes commissioners may provide money to cover some of the costs involved in putting in a research grant application - particularly if they want to encourage public involvement in research. They may also provide funding for training and support.

Unfortunately, most commissioners do not offer payment to either researchers or members of the public for the time spent working on research grant applications. The researcher's organisation may be able to offer expenses. However, do keep a record of all your expenses and the time spent completing the work as you may be able to claim payment later if the grant application is successful.



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 [6,7,8].

7. Am I getting involved in just this stage of the research?

If you get involved in a grant application you may be interested in continuing to be involved in the research if it receives funding. For example, through further consultation, by becoming a member of the advisory board that will guide the research, or by becoming a member of the research team carrying out the work [1].

It is worth thinking carefully about how much time and what level of involvement you want to commit to. It may be helpful to discuss your future role with others involved in putting together the application and whether or not you will be paid and what support you will be given.

8. What happens next?

Once the research grant application is submitted to the commissioner it is considered alongside all the other applications. Usually a **commissioning board** decides which applications will be awarded the money to do the research [9].

To help them decide, the commissioner often asks others, including members of the public, to **peer review** or to comment on the applications they receive [10]. They may also hold interviews and/or ask for further written information.

Some commissioners give feedback on applications, although the amount of comment varies. Some do not give any feedback at all. If you want feedback, you may have to ask.

If the application is successful, you will need to agree what exactly your involvement in the research will be. Like a job description, you can ask for this to be written down in detail with a clear outline of your involvement, the time involved, payment arrangements, etc.

9. 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 research activities see:

Buckland S., et al (2007) Public Information Pack. How to get actively involved in NHS, public health and social care research, Booklets 1-4, INVOLVE.

Booklet 1 – So what is it all about?

Booklet 2 – Getting started

Booklet 3 – Finding out more

Booklet 4 – Jargon Buster

Text notes

1. Buckland S., et al (2007) Booklet 1 Public Information Pack. How to get actively involved in NHS, public health and social care research, INVOLVE.
2. Buckland S., et al (2007) Booklet 2 Public Information Pack. How to get actively involved in NHS, public health and social care research, INVOLVE.
3. Turner M. and Beresford P. (2005) User Controlled Research: Its meaning and potential. Shaping Our Lives and the Centre for Citizen Participation, Brunel University. Full report and summary report available on INVOLVE's website.
4. Faulkner A. (2004) 'Capturing the experiences of those involved in the TRUE project: A story of colliding worlds'. INVOLVE.
5. The Learning Difficulties Research Team. (2006) Let me in - I'm a researcher! Getting involved in research. Department of Health. www.dh.gov.uk – see Publications.
6. For more detailed information about payment and the impact it may have on benefits and taxation please refer to Steel R. (2006) Guide to paying members of the public actively involved in research. INVOLVE. [A new edition is currently being written (2009)]
7. Scott J. (2008) Payment for involvement in research: helpful benefit rules and systems for avoiding benefit problems, INVOLVE.
8. 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.

9. See INVOLVE's guideline for members of the public on 'Being a member of a commissioning board.' www.invo.org.uk
10. See INVOLVE's guideline for members of the public on 'Peer reviewing research proposals.' www.invo.org.uk



Parlez vous research?

10. Jargon Buster

This jargon buster provides brief explanations of terms in **green bold** in the text of this guideline.

Commissioner

A commissioner is the person (or organisation) who asks for a piece of research to be carried out.

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.

Commissioning Board/Commissioning Panel

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.

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.

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.

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.'

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

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.

11. Acknowledgements

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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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