

Examples of public involvement in the Research Design Service (RDS)

Developing links to match researchers and members of the public

Purpose of developing links

One key role of the Research Design Service (RDS) is to develop links, relationships and partnerships between members of the public interested in contributing to health and social care research and the researchers planning research projects. To support this, the RDS in many regions have been working to develop databases of members of the public and local community and voluntary sector organisations within their region, for example charities, self-help groups, voluntary or third sector organisations.

Your RDS will be able to help you develop links appropriate to the research you are planning. Some of these databases are held by the RDS, while in Yorkshire and Humber (www.rds-yh.nihr.ac.uk/) the database of organisations interested in research is available to search through their website, giving local researchers direct access to the information.

How is it done?

RDS staff have adopted a pro-active approach to the initial groundwork for developing connections and links by identifying, approaching and engaging members of the public and representatives of local communities. The most effective way of doing this is going out to meet people in their own environments, rather than inviting them to events at a university or research centre.

The North East (www.rds-ne.nihr.ac.uk/) has found it helpful to work with other pan-regional organisations such as Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) and Community Voluntary Services and attending events run by them. They have also run drop-in clinics in a local hospital, which attracted members of the public and researchers.

Other parts of the RDS network have formalised their relationships with other groups and organisations. London RDS (www.rdslondon.co.uk/) has developed a working agreement with the Mental Health Research Network (MHRN) so that requests for help with mental health projects can be supported in a timely way by service users already involved with the MHRN. This has been used as a model by other regions. In the South East (www.rds-se.nihr.ac.uk/), a formal link with the Lived Experience Advisory Forum of the local mental health NHS trust has been established.

West Midlands RDS (www.rds-wm.nihr.ac.uk/web/guest/home) runs an annual networking event for members of the public and local organisations to find out more about research and involvement in the region.

Researchers who also work in health and social care services might find that their patients or service users from the practice setting, for example clinic or caseload, are interested in getting involved with research. South Central RDS (www.rds-sc.nihr.ac.uk/) works closely with clinicians and patients to support them as their relationships change with the new roles they are developing.

Value of developing community links

An approach which develops and maintains on-going links and relationships, is intended to ensure the matching work is able to respond quickly to the needs of specific funding applications, rather than being ad hoc and starting from scratch each time a new proposal comes up.

North East RDS (www.rds-ne.nihr.ac.uk/) has suggested that, in addition to enabling and developing constructive links with community-based organisations, there is potential beyond contributing to research design. For example, more established relationships can lead to more collaborative partnerships, with public co-applicants on grant applications, supporting the ongoing management of the research and contributing to the recruitment of people they represent and support. In addition, such organisations can be instrumental in widely communicating research results and effecting change.

This example has been produced by INVOLVE (www.invo.org.uk) working with members of the Research Design Service Involvement Forum. This Forum is facilitated by INVOLVE and brings together the patient and public involvement leads of National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Research Design Services. The Forum aims to support their work in advising on public involvement in research design and to share knowledge, resources and good practice.

For more information about public involvement in the Research Design Services see www.invo.org.uk/find-out-more/information-for-researchers/research-design-services-information